



WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **Wondrous wildlife** Join in the fun of our exciting ReNature festival and find out how the inspiring campaign to create new spaces for nature is going from strength to strength.
- **A big birthday for the South Downs Way** Find out how we're marking the 50th anniversary of this treasured route – and learn about two sisters who completed the epic journey.
- **Multimillion pound refurbishment** Discover the amazing new visitor facilities at Seven Sisters.
- **WIN a free day-out!** We've got 10 family tickets to give away for a beautiful downland venue!

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

Over £400k donated as ReNature festival begins

More than £400,000 has been raised so far to help find new spaces for nature in the National Park.

Exactly one year on from the launch of the ReNature campaign and the fundraising tally continues to rise for the inspiring initiative, which is looking to create an extra 13,000 hectares of habitat where plants and animals can thrive.

Following a “Call for Nature Sites” plea to landowners and community groups last autumn, 59 projects are now being progressed with a view to creating new wildlife habitat. They include entire farms, fields, road verges and old quarries, covering thousands of hectares.

Meanwhile, this month an exciting ReNature festival will take place from 16 to 24 July with the aim of encouraging people to do simple things to help nature thrive, such as picking up litter, creating a wild space in your garden or helping to survey wildlife. Activities will include a microvolunteering beach clean at Seven Sisters, a heathland discovery day and bookable guided walks, as well as a range of inspiring online videos.

As part of the festival, a selection of community groups, including those serving young people and those who may never have accessed the National Park, are being sent ReNature packs, crammed with nature-based goodies and activities. A limited number of packs are available for newsletter subscribers and can be applied for on a first-come, first-served basis by visiting this [webpage](#).



The public are also being invited to take three “pledges” and share images on social media for the



chance to win a day-out at a wildlife venue in the National Park. They will be invited to:

- **Experience** nature – share an image of you in the natural world, whether it be the National Park, your local park, or garden!
- **Care** for nature – share an image of you looking after nature, such as planting wildflowers or picking up litter.
- **Share** the caring for nature message with others (by sharing your images on Twitter, Facebook or Instagram and using hashtag #ReNature)

The three prizes include a family ticket to Marwell Zoo, RSPB Pulborough Brooks or Arundel Wetland Centre.

Andrew Lee, Director of Countryside Policy and Management for the South Downs National Park, said: “It’s been a hugely encouraging start to the ReNature campaign and I’d like to thank each and every person, community group and business that has pledged to support it. I think it underlines just how much people cherish nature.

South Downs Way is 50!



It's one of Britain's most iconic walks, taking in awe-inspiring views of coast and countryside.

Now, to celebrate South Downs Way's 50th birthday on 15 July, a special commemorative plaque is being produced for the 66 parishes along the 100-mile route.

And a celebratory beer is being crafted by the Long Man Brewery, which takes its name from the famous "Long Man of Wilmington" that has been delighting walkers for centuries.

The 100-mile route runs from Winchester in Hampshire to Eastbourne in East Sussex, taking in chalky peaks, ancient forest, magical river valleys and brilliant white cliffs.

On 15 July 1972 it was officially opened as the South Downs Way National Trail, making it the UK's fifth national trail to be established and its first long-distance bridleway.

Since then tens of thousands of people have walked, cycled or ridden the trail from Eastbourne to Winchester (or visa versa!) – each with their own unique story to tell.

Andy Gattiker, National Trails & Rights of Way Lead, said: "2022 is a really special year for the South Downs Way and it's amazing to think that the trail opened half a century ago.

"The beauty of the trail is that it offers something for everyone, whether it's an interesting day-trip, short break or a week-long ramble. We thought it would be a nice gesture for each of the parishes along the route to get a beautiful waymarker that can be attached to a fingerpost to celebrate this historic moment.

The special anniversary beer will be unveiled in September.

Tom O'Neill, from the Long Man Brewery, which won "Sussex Drink Producer of the Year" in 2021, said: "The South Downs Way is the lifeblood of so many businesses in the Cuckmere Valley and beyond, offering people the chance to escape, explore and discover the natural world around them. Here at Long Man we do everything we can to work at one with the natural systems and landscapes around us, including using our own barley grown alongside the trail to make our beer.

"We're delighted to help celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the South Downs Way by brewing an exclusive beer with real South Downs Way provenance."

"It's still very early stages, but we're working with a diverse range of projects that will eventually create new areas for nature in the National Park.

"It's a very exciting notion that within 10 years new areas could be teeming with wildlife and increasing the biodiversity of the region. None of this nature recovery work would be possible without the farmers and estates that make up a very significant portion of the National Park – and these land managers will continue to play a pivotal role as we move forward. I'd like to thank all those who have been involved so far for their enthusiasm for the project and look forward to forging new links in the years to come."

The National Park currently has 25 per cent of the land managed specifically for nature, such as nature reserves, woods, heaths, ponds and flower-rich road verges.

The additional 13,000 hectares would bring this to 33 per cent of land managed for nature – going beyond current UN-backed conservation targets of "30 per cent by 2030" (30 for 30).

The National Park Authority also wants to go one step further – ensuring that the remaining 67 per cent of the National Park is nature-friendly by 2030.

The South Downs National Park Trust, the official charity for the National Park, has been leading on the fundraising and has an ambitious target of raising £100m over the next decade to help nature recovery.



Joshua Esan, Engagement and Events Officer for the National Park, said: "We hope everyone can get involved in our festival this month. Each day will focus on a different habitat of the National Park, such as woodland, coast or

chalk grassland, and there'll be lots of interesting things to see, do and learn about.

"Experience nature, care for it and inspire others!"

Statistics show nature is in crisis everywhere. The latest national State of Nature report showed revealed that 41 per cent of UK species studied have declined, and some 133 species assessed have already been lost from British shores since 1500.

Around a quarter of the UK's mammals could also be at risk of disappearing altogether. Climate change, pollution and habitat loss are among the causing factors.

The extra 13,000 hectares would mean an area over three times the size of Portsmouth City (40km²), almost double the size of Southampton City (72.8km²), over a third again bigger than Brighton and Hove (87.5km²) and over six times the size of the City of Westminster in London (21.45km²), managed for nature.

Small donations can go a long way, with £5 paying for a square meter of wildflower meadow, while £10 could pay for one meter of hedgerow.

To see the programme for the festival, visit www.southdowns.gov.uk/ReNatureFestival2022

To donate to the South Downs National Park Trust's appeal visit this [fundraising page](#).



Huge makeover at Seven Sisters is unveiled



Brand-new visitor facilities that tell the fascinating story of landscape, nature and people have been unveiled at Seven Sisters Country Park.

Following investment of around £2m from the South Downs National Park Authority, the fully-refurbished visitor centre at the world-famous site is now open and delighting visitors.

The old facilities have been transformed, creating a bright, airy and interactive space to learn more about the country park and its coastal setting in the National Park.

Visitors will have everything they need for a memorable day-out, including exciting displays and activities relating to the wildlife, geology, history and people of the incredible location.

New and accessible toilet facilities, including a changing places toilet, have opened, while signage around the site has been given a total makeover, making it easier for people to find their way round.



The National Park Authority took ownership of the site last summer from East Sussex County Council and this work is just the first phase of refurbishments at the country park. Work is well under way to renovate holiday accommodation and facilities at nearby Foxholes, allowing more people to connect with nature and spend a night enjoying the International Dark Sky Reserve.

Lunch on the go is now possible for walkers and cyclists with the opening of a locally-sourced and sustainable takeaway food and drinks service.

Over the coming months a year round offer of activities will be unveiled as well as the opening of the newly refurbished Bike Hire, run by The Cuckmere Cycle Company.

Seven Sisters Country Park comprises 280 hectares of chalk cliffs, meandering river valley and open chalk grassland – often called “Europe’s rainforest in miniature” as a single square metre can include 40 wildflower

species and over 20 different butterflies. Up to a million people visit each year to enjoy its beauty and wildlife and the famous white cliffs have been used as



the backdrop for many Hollywood movies, including *Harry Potter*, *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* and most recently, *Summerland*.

Peter Cousin, Commercial Manager for Seven Sisters Country Park, said: “After well over two years in the making, we’re so excited to be opening our new facilities.

“Seven Sisters is the perfect introduction to the South Downs National Park and we hope our facilities will inspire people and create a sense of wonderment for just how special this landscape is. This is a globally-important site where nature and people come together and we’re proud to have a visitor centre that does justice to the location.

“Whether it’s a first-time visit, or you’re a regular along this coastline, do come and have a look at the new facilities. We look forward to welcoming everyone!”

Trevor Beattie, Chief Executive of the South Downs National Park Authority, said: “This is a big milestone for Britain’s youngest National Park and we’re excited for the future.



“We’ve made a long-term commitment to not only providing a world-class experience for visitors, but also being a nature recovery hub for the South East. Thanks to some of our innovative work, we’re already starting

to see the first green shoots of nature recovery.

“This is a treasured site and so much more than just a great view, so we hope our new visitor offer inspires people to learn more about Seven Sisters and, ultimately, care for the site so it can be enjoyed by generations to come.”

For more information visit the [Seven Sisters website](#).



New lease of life at historic railway station



Why not leave the car at home this summer and enjoy a train ride into the heart of the National Park?

Amberley Station is the perfect stepping stone into the South Downs, located right next to the South Downs Way and some glorious riverside walks.

The station has recently undergone a refurbishment, with a charming newly-restored waiting room that is crammed with information and imagery about the historic village and the South Downs.

Allison Thorpe, who leads access and recreation for the National Park Authority, said: “Amberley Station is perfectly located for exploring the Arun Valley and nearby villages. It’s also close to the South Downs Way, making it an ideal staging point for those starting or finishing a leg of the National Trail.

“We were delighted to work with Southern Rail, Amberley Museum and Southeast Communities Rail Partnership (SCRP) to enhance the station environment and provide interpretation for visitors. The beautiful panels in the restored Waiting Room provide an insight into the heritage and landscape of the area with ideas for exploring further afield, including a trip to the next station down the line for walks around Arundel.”

Valerie Mills, Director at Amberley Museum, added: “Amberley Museum was very pleased to be able to contribute to the recent enhancements at Amberley Station by providing images and source material for some of the heritage artwork.”

Rowena Tyler, SCRCP Community Development Officer for the Arun Valley Line, said: The newly renovated shelter, and station frontage, with the community inspired artwork and plants has made Amberley station a much more welcoming place to either set off on a train journey, or alight to enjoy all that the surrounding area has to offer.”



Winchester, Petersfield, Southeast and Lewes railway stations also provide wonderful opportunities to access the National Park and the South Downs Way.

New chair is elected

A new Chair has been elected to lead the South Downs National Park Authority and has vowed to further strengthen efforts to tackle the biodiversity crisis.

Vanessa Rowlands was appointed at the Annual General Meeting of the National Park Authority following a vote by Members.

Vanessa has been Deputy Chair for the past two years and takes over from Ian Phillips, who had been leading the Authority since 2020. At the meeting, Ian was elected as Deputy Chair.



Vanessa was appointed as a Member by the East Sussex Parishes in June 2019 and has lived in the Cuckmere Valley for the past 18 years.

Vanessa said: “It’s a huge honour and very exciting to become Chair.

“I’m really proud that I’m the first Chair of SDNPA who’s come from a parish council within the National Park. I have been an active member of my local community in Cuckmere Valley, East Sussex for many years and have experienced first-hand what it’s like to live and work in this wonderful, but fragile, landscape.

“I’m keen to focus on the three priorities of the Corporate Plan – nature recovery, climate action and creating a National Park for all – and working with our amazing partners. We work with such brilliant, hardworking partners and one of our big jobs is to enable them to do what they do best.

“I’m all about enabling people to do positive things and make a difference. I’d also like to take this opportunity to thank the dedicated staff at the National Park.

“I want to focus on relevance. It’s about the National Park being relevant to the businesses and our local communities, both inside and outside the National Park, so we can all be proud of this amazing region and all the opportunities it brings. I want to continue to connect with communities across the length and breadth of the National Park, as well as those villages, towns and cities around the National Park.

“Nature recovery is a big priority. I don’t want generations of the future to ask ‘Why didn’t they do more to help nature?’ With our ReNature campaign, we have this incredible chance to make a difference and create a nature recovery hub that will bring wider benefits to the entire region. Ultimately, I want nature to be everywhere, for everyone, whether it’s in your garden, local park or indeed the National Park.”

And Vanessa added: “As the new Chair, I want to hear people’s stories – stories that may not have been told yet and also new voices. There’s a lot of work ahead, but I’m excited for the challenge.”

Take part in the Chalk Stream Challenge!



Sophie Evingar is an events officer for the Watercress and Winterbournes project, which is being led by Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust. The scheme brings together local communities and 16 organisations to restore and celebrate the county's amazing crystal-clear chalk streams.

The chalk streams that meander across Hampshire are among its most precious ecological gems. Found almost nowhere else on Earth, these waters give hope to many rare and vulnerable species. But, with threats mounting and the future uncertain, our chalk streams will need champions for years to come.

Luckily, there is a new way to teach young people about this, courtesy of the Watercress and Winterbournes Landscape Partnership Scheme. This initiative unites the South Downs National Park Authority with 15 other partners in caring for the headwaters of the Rivers Test and Itchen. The scheme wouldn't be possible without its passionate and dedicated volunteers.

Two such volunteers - Hazel and Sarah - have used their experience with youth groups to design the Chalk Stream Challenge; a set of outdoor activities focused on wildlife, habitats, and heritage. The challenge is suitable for Scouts, Guides, or similar groups, and can be tailored to different ages. It combines pre-tested routes along local streams with opportunities for exploration.

A range of resources are available online, including fun facts, route maps, spotter guides, challenge activities, and completion certificates. Group leaders can run the challenge at no cost using these, or reward their members with special fabric badges for a small fee. They can also choose to expand their challenge with a stream dipping session run by Wessex Rivers Trust.

There are several challenge routes to choose from, all 'off-road' but close to public transport, and parking, as well as places to find refreshments and toilet facilities. The ones currently available are based in Alresford, Whitchurch, and Andover, but the activities can easily be adapted to other local chalk streams.

So if you're a group leader looking to connect your young people with nature, why not take up the challenge? Learn more at www.hiwwt.org.uk/winterbournes/challenge

Have your say on new regional transport vision



People are being invited to have their say on a new long-term transport strategy for the South East.

Transport for the South East (TfSE) has launched a 12-week public consultation on a £45 billion plan that sets out the steps to decarbonise the transport system across the region and trigger sustainable economic growth.

Over the past five years TfSE has worked with a range of partners, including local authorities, local enterprise partnerships (LEPs), district and borough authorities, National Parks and other protected landscapes and representatives from National Highways, Network Rail and Transport for London. A shortlist of transport interventions have now been proposed, aimed at making life better for people, as well as helping businesses and the environment.

The plan proposes a total capital cost of £45 billion over 27 years – aimed at generating 21,000 new jobs, an additional 550,000 rail trips a day and 1.6 million bus, mass transit and ferry trips a day. The proposals aim to take more than four million car trips a day off the roads of the South East.

Councillor Keith Glazier, Chair of Transport for the South East, said: "Our plan is ambitious, but it is achievable. It is an investment plan that for the first time looks at all modes and goes beyond boundaries to consider connectivity across the whole of the South East.

"Once finalised, this plan will be the blueprint for future investment in strategic transport infrastructure for the next thirty years."

TfSE would like to hear from anyone who lives, works, travels through or visits the South East region. To view the draft Strategic Investment Plan and respond to the consultation visit this [digital hub](#).

Rambler bus returns

Are you interested in exploring Hampshire's beautiful downland villages and countryside this summer?

The South Downs Rambler Bus runs between Winchester and Petersfield railway stations on Sundays from 10 July to 11 September (plus August Bank Holiday).

Plan your journey with this [timetable](#).

Inspiring project helps people's mental wellbeing



Amazing pieces of artwork and craftsmanship will go on display next month at Petersfield Museum.

The artistic creations have been created by people who took part in Timescape – an inspiring initiative aimed at exploring art through history.

The project aimed to support the mental and physical wellbeing of those experiencing COVID anxiety, helping people connect with each other to reduce social isolation and also explore cultural heritage by using traditional artisan techniques, such as weaving, stone carving and pottery.

The initiative was a partnership between community arts organisation Artscape, the National Park Authority, Butser Ancient Farm and the Weald and Downland Living Museum.

People can come and view the arts and crafts at Petersfield Museum from 2 to 7 August. Entry to this specific exhibition is free.

Artist Mandie Molyneux, Director of Artscape, said: "Timescape has been an extraordinary project. It has drawn people from totally different backgrounds and abilities outside into the beautiful stunning landscape of not only The South Downs National Park, but also engaged us in the vast heritage of two outstanding open air museums, Butser Ancient Farm and The Weald and Downland Living Museum.

"Not only have our participants enjoyed experiencing, learning and creating though responding to ancient techniques, but so have I alongside everyone else.

"Being a tiny part of everyone's journey of discovery has been an awesome privilege, that's also impacted on my own arts practice and the direction that Artscape finds itself heading."

Kate Drake, Health and Wellbeing Officer for the National Park, said: "Do come and take a look at the exhibition! There's some wonderful craftsmanship on display and some poignant personal stories."



One participant said: "It made my heart sing."

A further exhibition is planned in Chichester in September, with details to be announced soon.

Summer celebration at South Downs Centre



The South Downs Centre will be throwing open its doors for a summer celebration next month.

The free open day in Midhurst takes place from midday to 3pm on Saturday, 6 August and will include a range of fun activities and entertainment.

Highlights will include live music from Yukon Bass, featuring covers of Kylie Minogue, George Ezra, and The Stranglers. Meanwhile, there will be traditional dancing from the Sompton Village Morris Dancers, fantastic face painting, nature-based activities and delicious Jude's icecream.

Children will have a chance to win prizes during the event as part of Madhurst Festival.

People will also be able to enjoy the wonderful interpretation displays at the centre, telling the story of the National Park, its wildlife, landscape, and people.

Our rangers will be hosting a dedicated wildlife room, crammed with information about owls, bats, frogs and much more.



Zara Kelleway, Support Services Coordinator, who is helping to organise the event, said: "After the past couple of years, we're really excited to be holding this event at the South Downs Centre.

"It's a wonderful opportunity to have some family fun and find out more about your National Park.

"It will be a very relaxed event with lots of activities for people of all ages.

"We're going to be asking children to help us build a life-size bug hotel, so it promises to be a very fun afternoon!"



Take the lead to help heath wildlife flourish



This summer the Heathlands Reunited team are popping up to promote responsible dog ownership and encouraging dog owners to Take the Lead.

Last month we popped up on Kingsley Common, near Bordon, a little section of heathland just on the boundary of the National Park that's home to nightjar, woodlark and a range of rare reptile species. We spent the morning talking to people about the impact that dog waste has on the fragile make up of our lowland heath, and highlighting the issue using brightly coloured eco powder paint.



Here are four reasons to pick up your dog's poo:

1. Preserving a habitat rarer than rainforest

Did you know that dog waste is in fact harmful to our rare heathland habitat? Dog waste changes the nutrient profile of the soil.

2. Looking after our grazers

Dog waste often contains a parasite called Neospora, which can have devastating impacts on grazing cattle.

3. Harmful to humans

Dog poo can cause toxocariasis, a nasty infection that can lead to dizziness, nausea, asthma and even blindness or seizures in children.

4. Isn't dog poo biodegradable?

Dog waste can take up to 12 months to break down. In addition, when it rains, water washes over dog waste and then enters our water system.

You can help by making sure you always pick up, bag and bin your dog waste (any public waste bin will do). Nowadays, compostable dog poo bags are readily available to reduce plastic pollution. No bin? No problem, our clever friends at Dicky bag have come up with a nifty bag for transporting poo whilst out and about in the countryside until you find a bin. Visit this [webpage](#) to find out more.

If you're a dog walker who is passionate about the countryside, looking after the beautiful places and would like more information on becoming a dog ambassador, please contact heathlands@southdowns.gov.uk

Joyous exhibition explores union of wildlife and farming



From barn owls and brown hares, to harvest mice and hairstreak butterflies, a new exhibition takes you on a journey of discovery to meet iconic farmland species in the South Downs.

The exhibition, showing at Gilbert White's House Museum until 14 August, is a collaboration between natural history illustrator Rachel Hudson and Hampshire farmer group, the Selborne Landscape Partnership (SLP).

The exhibition champions species we are in danger of losing and shows how the restoration of field margins, from hedgerows to wildflower strips, is making a positive difference. It is also a call to action to support local farmers who are supporting wildlife.

The exhibition is in two parts. The Selborne Bestiary is a wall display of nine illustrated portraits of species that the SLP is supporting through conservation. It is a visual metaphor for declining species in isolated habitat fragments and the importance of joining up habitats.

What happens in between the squares of The Selborne Bestiary and how these species can thrive in the contemporary farmed landscape, is explored in 'Margins'. Three two-metre high vertical 'Margins'- Hedge, Edge, Strip - show what life can look like when these habitats are planted, managed and reconnected by farmers and volunteers across the landscape. Each margin will reveal the energy and struggles of spring, summer and autumn, from the viewpoints of the animals themselves.



Kate Faulkner, from Selborne Landscape Partnership, said: "From the Margins' is a very joyous and uplifting exhibition where Rachel Hudson's contemporary illustrations beautifully depict how farming and nature conservation work side by side."

Prize giveaway! 10 family tickets to be won in contest



Nestled in the beautiful landscape of the South Downs National Park, the Weald & Downland Living Museum offers families an enjoyable and captivating day out in the great outdoors.

With a jam-packed programme of summer celebrations including a fantastic line-up of outdoor theatre featuring family favourites, music and comedy, there is something to entertain audiences of all ages. Running from 26 July to 31 August, you can bring a picnic and enjoy shows such as David Walliams' Awful Auntie, The Wind in the Willows, Peter Rabbit, Shakespeare's Twelfth Night and music from Lou Fowkes.

The Museum's popular Wonderful Weeks also return for the summer holidays, offering family fun and activities throughout August.

The theme this year is traditional games and pastimes, with a programme of activities, crafts and demonstrations that change weekly. Take part in nature trails, orienteering, singing, puzzles and traditional games from the past. Families can also enjoy walking through the beautiful grounds, discovering the many historic buildings, traditional farm animals and agricultural activities. With so much taking place, one visit is never enough. So why not take advantage of a new monthly membership plan with payments starting from as little as £8 per month for a family.

To find out more or book tickets please visit www.wealddown.co.uk/summerseason

TICKET GIVEAWAY

We've teamed up with the Weald & Downland Living Museum to give away **10 family tickets** to the Museum. The ticket includes two adults and two children.



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

Those who are already signed up can email "Poplar Cottage" to newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk before midnight on 31 July.

Sign up to the newsletter [here](#) and see competition T&Cs [here](#). **PLEASE NOTE** the winning tickets can only be used on weekdays.

Walk this Way – Sisters take on epic hilltop journey



Charlie Hellewell and her sister Miranda Bassett recently completed a long-held ambition of walking the South Downs Way. Here Charlie gives her account of a sisterly adventure she'll never forget.

Springtime is a perfect time to walk the South Downs Way. The weather is generally kind and the days are full of light. I've worked at the South Downs National Park for six years and have always intended to walk the length of the SDW. Being a linear route means being organised with public transport or lifts to complete short sections, so in some ways it seemed easier to just keep going!

By immersing myself in the trail as a walker, I hoped not only to complete it, but to enjoy the sights and sounds of the surrounding natural world.

Persuading my sister Mirry to join me was easy. She is always up for a challenge and only a few years ago we cycled from London to Paris on a charity ride. Suddenly we had a date and got down to planning our route. We would stay in B&Bs and travel as light as possible. The path tends to follow the top of the downs but most of the accommodation is in the villages or settlements at the base of the hills. Therefore, there will always be extra mileage leaving and rejoining the trail.

Day 1 - Winchester to West Meon 16.8 miles

Day one saw us start at the Winchester City Mill, heading out of this ancient cathedral city in gently falling rain. Once we crossed the footbridge over the motorway the route became more familiar, passing through the charming village of Chilcombe on our way to Cheesefoot Head and beyond.

The sun finally made a welcome appearance and our route followed chalky paths to the familiar soundscape of skylarks, yellowhammers and swooping swallows.

From the top of Beacon Hill we could see the chalk ridge stretching away to the east. It was downhill from here to the village of Exton where we bypassed the usual favourite of the Shoe Inn to follow the seemingly never ending Meon Valley Trail, a former railway line, now a multi-user path, to the pretty village of West Meon and our accommodation for the night.

Day 2 - West Meon to Buriton 16.3 miles

It was a harder day today. Walking distance isn't a problem but when you're carrying a pack, it suddenly becomes more challenging. A decent sleep at our B&B

meant we felt refreshed and ready to climb back to the SDW at Old Winchester Hill!

Then it was down to Meon Springs before a long ascent up to Butser Hill – the highest point on the South Downs Way at 270m. We could see the sun shining on the Solent from the top, over to the Isle of Wight and Hayling Island. With leaden legs we headed down the steep side of Butser, glad we weren't heading uphill like the DofE groups collapsed and eating snacks half way up!



Day 3 - Buriton to Cocking 12.4 miles

We left our B&B armed with a packed lunch from our host, and climbed steeply out of Buriton through the old chalk pit nature reserve to get back to the SDW.

A steady stream of runners and cyclists passed us going both ways, with it seemingly being a busy section of the Way. We passed beautiful stretches of fields with wildflowers bursting to life. Harting Down appeared through the trees and a stunning view to the north of the classic English patchwork field system rolling away into the distance towards Black Down, the highest point in the National Park.

Day 4 – Cocking to Amberley 14.7 miles

The first thing we noticed today was the quiet. We hardly met a soul, partly due to it being Monday and partly to it being a less travelled section. The first person we did meet was Chloe, one of our lovely National Park rangers in a Land Rover, who had come to Graffham Down to take part in a dormouse survey. So good to have a cheerful chat with Chloe! We were also pleased to later hear a cuckoo as we crossed the river Arun to Amberley.

Day 5 - Amberley to Poynings 20 miles

A longer day of walking today but we were getting used to it. As we approached the spooky location of Chanctonbury Hill, known for its folklore and tales of weird happenings, the thunder started rumbling and the skies opened. We were soaked! Legend has it that Chanctonbury Ring was created by the piles of earth created when Satan was digging Devil's Dyke.

Day 6 - Poynings to Lewes 14.5 miles

The skylarks were still in full song the next day, despite the blustery conditions. Ditchling Beacon, the highest point of the SDW in Sussex, was obviously exposed, so we hugged any bushes we could find for protection. It was interesting to find some dew ponds as we walked, surrounded by windswept trees.

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Dew ponds have been used for hundreds of years by farmers to water livestock at the top of hills. Usually clay lined, they were an essential part of farming life on the chalk ridge.

Day 7 - Lewes to West Firle 11.8 miles

Leaving Lewes to re-join the SDW we met a cheery American hiker 'from the Pacific North West' coming down off the ridge. She was lucky enough to be in Kingston visiting her daughter and was fascinated that we were doing the whole of the Way. Today in the sunshine, we had great views from the ridge, looking down to our left at the village of Rodmell where the Bloomsbury writer Virginia Woolf once lived at Monk's House.

Day 8 - West Firle to Alfriston, then on to Eastbourne via Exceat and Seven Sisters 19.6 miles

Our final day and bright sunshine to greet us on arguably the most stunning section of the walk. The Seven Sisters are a set of sheer undulating chalk cliffs, with the SDW following within a safe distance of the edge. With a sky so blue we enjoyed every dip and rise as two spittfires suddenly appeared and flew overhead, returning to perform a display above us, seemingly just for us. We whooped with joy, waving like mad things at them!



Passing the iconic red and white Beachy Head lighthouse, we eventually arrived at the finishing post, with hugs and celebrations all round.

I feel incredibly lucky to have had this time with my big sister. It wasn't until we were heading home towards Hampshire (thanks to our lift) that we realised how far we had actually walked this week. All those places we drove past that we had visited over the last few days. What an achievement!

Two sisters walking to the Seven Sisters.



Why not share your South Downs Way memories and experiences with us on social media? Share any images and video using #50SDW 😊

Things to do in the South Downs this July

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/



- Head to **Petersfield Eco-Fair** on 17 July between 10am and 4pm. The free event at Petersfield Heath will be celebrating “earth-friendly” living and will include information on saving energy in your home, upcycling clothes and growing a wilder garden.
- A joyous day of free live music, street performance, circus acts and hands-on activities takes place in the Pleasure Gardens of Petworth House for the **Summer Weekend Out** on 16 July.
- **Beach Life** – the ultimate celebration of extreme sports, outdoor life, and fun by the sea – comes to Eastbourne this month. The free event, mainly at Princes Park, takes place on 16 and 17 July and promises to showcase local music, street food delights and seafront sports.
- The 205th anniversary of Jane Austen’s death will be marked with an acclaimed **theatrical production** at Petersfield Museum on 18 July.
- Amberley Museum will be holding its **Railway Gala Weekend** on 23 and 24 July with the return of its famous steam locomotive “Peter”.
- Eastbourne welcomes the brand new E-Festival from 29 to 31 July, with headliners Toploader returning to their hometown. This family friendly, hybrid **eco festival** combines live music, a street food village and tips on living an environmentally friendly lifestyle across three sites at the Western Lawns, Wish Tower Slopes and Princes Park.

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

P1 – Main Image by Sam Moore; P1 water vole – Dick Hawkes; P5 Left – Katrina Martin