

# SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

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SOUTH DOWNS  
NATIONAL PARK

## WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **Caring for the Downs** We renew our Take The Lead initiative and encourage responsible dog walking in your National Park to help local farmers and precious wildlife.
- **A National Park for all** Learn more about strides being made to improve disability access and how we're helping to support people with disabilities – both physical and hidden.
- **Win a £30 voucher!** Find out about how you could win a prize this spring...by going for a walk!
- **Competition** Win a family pass to one of the region's biggest heritage and transport museums.

As always, please send your comments and ideas to us at [newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk)

## Encouraging responsible dog walking in the National Park

**It's great that people can get out for walks, often with dogs, to enjoy all the health and wellbeing benefits of the National Park.**

As lambing and ground-nesting bird season begins this March, we're encouraging dogwalkers to take the lead and keep paws on the path.

With dog ownership at an all-time high post-pandemic, we're re-energising our "Take The Lead" campaign, which encourages responsible dog walking with simple actions, such as keeping canines on leads around livestock and bagging and binning dog poo.

Since the National Park Authority came into being in 2011, the number of dogs in the UK has significantly increased – from around 8m in 2011 to around 13m today – meaning it's more important than ever to follow some simple guidelines when walking your dog in the countryside.

The four messages for Take The Lead are:

- ✓ **Keep dogs on a lead near livestock**
- ✓ **Bag and bin your poo, any public bin will do**
- ✓ **Stick to the path. Protect ground-nesting birds by sticking to the paths, especially between 1 March and 15 September during the breeding season.**



Taking the lead at St Catherine's Hill, Winchester

- ✓ **Do not enter military training areas when the red flags are flying**

To mark the campaign, the National Park is inviting dogwalkers to enjoy the stunning views and snap a picture of their pooch on the lead and sticking to the path in the South Downs. The competition starts on 15 March and runs through the Easter Holidays and Discover National Parks Fortnight, finishing on 14 April. The prize for the best image will be an amazing dog hamper full of tasty treats for your four-legged friend and a "poop scoop" Dicky Bag – an award-winning neoprene bag that's lightweight, airtight, washable and leak proof to store your dog poo bags until you find a suitable bin.

To enter simply post a picture with #PawsOnThePath and #TaketheLead on Instagram or Facebook. Dr Marc

## Wheely good news!

Abraham OBE, or 'Marc the Vet' as he's usually known, a multi-award-winning veterinary surgeon, author, broadcaster, and animal welfare campaigner, will be judging the entries.



Unfortunately, there have been several reported incidents of sheep worrying in the South Downs over the past couple of years and statistics from the National Sheep Association show that 70% of UK sheep farmers have experienced a sheep worrying attack in the past 12 months. It's not only young lambs that are at risk from being chased by dogs, pregnant ewes can abort their unborn lambs if scared by dogs. For any farmer it's devastating emotionally and financially to discover any of their flock has been injured, or worse, killed, in a dog attack.

Sticking to the paths is particularly important at this time of year as many birds, such as nightjar and curlew, lay their eggs directly on the ground and can easily be disturbed by a curious canine. Mothers will often abandon a nest and her eggs if disturbed.

Andy Gattiker, who leads on access for the National Park Authority, said: "Our focus at the National Park is on education and engagement when it comes to dogwalking.

"Responsible dog walking is a great way for people to get out, get fit and experience the National Park. However, we also understand that having dogs off leads can potentially have a devastating impact on farmers, as well as fragile wildlife-rich habitats.



"The aim of our 'Take The Lead' campaign is to help everyone, including dog walkers, to have an enjoyable and safe experience in the National Park."

Sussex-based vet Dr Marc Abraham said: "Dog ownership is at an all-time high post-Covid, so it's never been more important to make sure our four-legged friends are kept under control at all times, which means sticking to the paths during ground-nesting bird and lambing season, as well as picking up their poop and disposing of it safely and responsibly, plus highlighting a new online 'toolkit' for communities looking to set up their own dog ambassador schemes."

If you're looking to raise awareness in your local area about responsible dog ownership you may want to think about setting up a dog ambassador scheme. Having regular dog walkers in your area talking to other dog walkers can be a great way of helping educate people about how they can ensure they have a fun and safe visit to the countryside with their pooch. The National Park has created an online toolkit, full of useful information on setting up a dog ambassador scheme, and it can be seen [here](#)

For more information on Take The Lead visit [www.southdowns.gov.uk/take-the-lead/](http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/take-the-lead/)



**Off-road mobility scooters unveiled last March have been put through their paces hundreds of times over the past year.**

Scores of people have enjoyed exploring the landscape on the four-wheeled scooters, which can cover all types of terrain and are aimed at helping people with restricted mobility to make the most of the countryside and its breathtaking views.

The scooters have been used over 150 times at Seven Sisters Country Park, more than 50 times at Hogmoor Inclosure at Bordon, and 149 times at Queen Elizabeth Country Park, near Waterlooville.

The project was funded by a £174,000 Defra grant to help more people access the National Park.

The scooters have also been available for hire from Cadence Cycle Café, in Cocking, and 15 people with limited mobility have enjoyed exploring the South Downs Way.

Bay and Eastbourne Rollers put together a video showcasing their experience of using the scooters and it can be watched [here](#).

The group said: "There's much to see as you wander along, beautiful scenery and lots of wildlife. It's absolutely fantastic!"

Claire Onslow, who manages Seven Sisters Country Park, added: "We know that the provision of the scooters has helped visitors revisit the park after many years of not being able to due to mobility constraints. This has included keen birdwatchers who have appreciated being able to spend time in the park again. I'm told the availability of a scooter also enabled a visitor to join an Sussex Wildlife Trust birdwatching day here so that's fabulous!"



For more information on scooters and inclusive equipment for hire across the National Park, visit [www.southdowns.gov.uk/all-abilities/inclusive-equipment-for-hire/](http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/all-abilities/inclusive-equipment-for-hire/)

## Spotlight on disabled access



**Anita Kerwin-Nye recently took on the role of Director of Landscape and Strategy at the National Park following the retirement of her long-serving predecessor, Andrew Lee. For Disabled Access Day this month, Anita shines a spotlight on disabled access in the South Downs and shares her own experiences.**

A wise friend said that we should design the world as if we were likely to be disabled at some point – because in truth most of us will be.

A significant knee injury puts me in this place. I am temporarily disabled. The countryside is a refuge, but accessing it can mean serious pain.

And I am currently typing this with an increased font size as my eyes make the shift to middle age!

Two of my children have neurodivergent conditions – which for one can manifest in extreme anxiety in new places. But both are better in the outdoor spaces with the connections to nature that we know have such a positive effect on well-being.

This is not a woe to me, rather a recognition that the things we put into place to support those who have disabilities are of benefit to us all. My career history has been in access – from teaching children to taking children with disabilities on residential trips and to my work at YHA taking a million children into the countryside.

I am therefore delighted to have joined SDNP as Director for Landscape and Strategy. I carry the brief for both of the National Park's core purposes – having the responsibility to balance access for all with the conservation and enhancement of nature and heritage.

Of course some lack of access for people with disabilities/disabled people is physical. And in natural landscapes and heritage sites these things can be more challenging to address. A focus on accessible paths is important and – where we can – using easier to walk or wheel on surfaces, and having 'Miles Without Stiles', will help not just those with wheelchairs but also those with pushchairs, crutches, temporary injuries or those less steady on their feet.

When considering access it is probably worth remembering that one person's challenging terrain is actually another person's positive personal challenge – and vice versa. I supported a friend in the first wheelchair trek across the whole of the Hadrian's Wall. A challenge most people would struggle with on foot. Whereas for me a walk of half a mile is a major milestone when I used to walk the whole South Downs Way.

We know that equipment can help access and we are delighted to have two Trampers available at the site we own at **Seven Sisters** and that several of our partners have them at sites throughout **the Park**.

And practical amenities matter. The toilets at Seven Sisters are fully accessible and also unisex, with each toilet being entirely self-contained with a sink and floor to ceiling doors. We also have a Changing Places toilet at the country park and accessible disabled toilets at the South Downs Centre in Midhurst for the public and staff.

But as well as physical access how do we support those who communicate in different ways? In both Seven Sisters Country Park and interpretation we support across the Park, we ensure appropriate and clear font sizes, accessible language and a range of recorded experiences – including the brilliant **Cuckmere Audio Trail** (launched last year)

For those – like my children – who have anxiety or autism, loud noises, new situations and other sensory experiences can be a challenge. National Park staff have access to training in neurodiversity and many tourist places in the South Downs are now offering quiet sessions, the use of headphones or calm, chillout spaces, for lots of their shows or sessions where you can learn more about the history, culture and landscape of the National Park. Take a look at the **Novium Museum** in Chichester, **Winchester Science Museum and Planetarium** in Hampshire and **Towner Eastbourne** in Eastbourne.

This signposting to and working with others is an important part of our role. As we don't own the majority of the land in the National Park, most of our work on access is in supporting others. Many of our grant funding schemes have supported **disability access schemes** and we work with special schools – and schools more widely – to have both day visits and 'nights under the stars' staying in the Park. We capture some of this at our **accessibility hub** and always welcome other examples that we can share.



And, lastly, a classic example of something that supports people with disabilities but actually supports us all. Benches. I am a bench bagger. I love that at Seven Sisters Country Park we have benches that include spaces for those in wheelchairs. And that some of our audio recordings play next to

benches so that people can enjoy nature, heritage and a rest in one space. But for me – and I know it is controversial – this bench oversees the best view from the Park. And – this weekend – provided a valuable rest on a (very) short bumble along the South Downs Way.

There is always more we can do to increase disability access across the South Downs. Always good to hear what you think we do well and what we can improve. And for us all to have a view on where access adjustments can work for everyone.

## Cultural hub gets go-ahead



An artist's impression of the new development

### **Plans for a new culture, arts and education hub that will provide a downland visitor gateway have been approved.**

Members of the South Downs National Park Authority's Planning Committee voted to grant permission, subject to conditions, to plans for Black Robin Farm, off Beachy Head Road, Eastbourne, at a meeting held at County Hall, Lewes.

The planning approval is subject to conditions, including a Section 106 legal agreement to secure an expanded bus service, a new public footpath and further consideration of the location of the proposed bus stop to reduce impact on the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

The plans, put forward by Eastbourne Borough Council, include a change of use of the farmstead site to include a cultural and education centre with business studios, refectory and event space, as well as the construction of a new gallery building. The development will include new pedestrian access and works to the existing vehicle access, vehicle parking, and landscaping.

The hub will be operated by Towner Eastbourne.

The scheme includes areas for chalk grassland restoration, and the restoration of two dew ponds, both of which are objectives of the Eastbourne Downland Estate Whole Estate Plan (WEP). There will also be new hedgerow planting for wildlife.

It's estimated the cultural centre will attract up to 100,000 visitors per year and the proposals include sustainable travel measures, such as improved local public bus services.

Mike Hughes, Director of Planning (Interim) for the National Park Authority, said: "This new hub will provide the public with extensive opportunities to connect with the culture, history, geography, ecology and land management practices of the area.

"Cultural heritage and providing opportunities for people to enjoy the National Park are the Authority's two key purposes and these proposals enhance both."

## New wildlife haven created



### **A beautiful wildlife corridor of trees has been planted in the centre of a South Downs village to mark The King's Coronation.**

His Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of West Sussex, Lady Emma Barnard, helped villagers plant the first of 12 cherry and crab apple trees in Singleton.

The trees will grow and blossom, providing an attractive area for visitors, as well as creating a haven for many birds and insects.

A special plaque has taken pride of place in Singleton to mark the ceremonial moment the first tree was planted.

It comes after funding from the Lord-Lieutenant's Office and the South Downs National Park Trust, which has been leading the "Trees for the Downs" initiative. More than 60,000 trees have been planted in the past four years across 100 sites in a bid to create more space for nature to flourish and enhance the National Park's treescape. The tree project is just one strand of the National Park's ReNature initiative, which is aiming to create 13,000 hectares of new wildlife habitat, together with improving the existing nature areas in the South Downs.

The planting is also part of Singleton's Accessibility Project, which aims to supply 15 parking spaces in the centre of the village, close to the South Downs Way. The rural parking facility will include disabled parking, mobility scooter parking, and a bike rack.

Jeremy Rigby, Singleton and Charlton Parish Councillor, said: "It has pride of place and can't be missed by the many walkers and visitors who will pass through the village for several generations to come, reminding all of a special moment in history."

Lady Emma, who is also President of the South Downs National Park Trust, said: "I am very happy that this fine little tree, a gift to the people of West Sussex, is now in such a beautiful place in the heart of the South Downs. As a living reminder of The King's Coronation, it will bring joy to so many people for years to come."

Donate to Tree for The Downs [here](#).

## Girl walks South Downs Way to help support healthier rivers



**Seven-year-old Lauris Prince has walked 100 miles in 10 days to raise money to help protect the National Park's precious rivers.**

Lauris walked the South Downs Way from Eastbourne to Winchester, braving blizzards and sub-zero temperatures to raise money for the Ouse & Adur Rivers Trust, which is working to create cleaner, healthier waterways.

Lauris, from Barcombe, near Lewes, said: "My favourite animals are beavers and otters, and I want the rivers to be clean enough so that they can live there."

Lauris has managed to raise around £1,000 so far through her Just Giving site, mainly by handing out homemade cards to people she met along the route.

Her mum, Hanna Prince, who walked the route with her, said the response from both friends and strangers has been amazing.

"One of the best things about the whole experience was chatting with people we met on the Downs, many of whom had their own amazing stories," said Hanna.



"Lauris has been walking on the Downs since she was tiny, and she's always loved it up there – the landscape is a big part of our family psyche. She's wanted to walk the full 100 miles for a while, mainly for the challenge but also

because she was keen to see more of the SDW than just our little eastern stretch. The parts she liked most were the ones where she saw wildlife, like the deer around Graffham Down and a fox trotting across the path at Alfriston.

"She was also fascinated by the places with stories attached - the tale of the Devil appearing at Chanctonbury Ring and offering you a bowl of soup in exchange for your soul was a favourite!"

Lauris is still fundraising and you can donate [here](#).

## SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY Congratulations to winner of public vote in photo contest!



**A serene image of one of Sussex's most sacred hills is the winner of the South Downs National Park's People's Choice award.**

More than 1,200 votes were cast for a range of beautiful images from the shortlist of this year's annual photography competition, which had the theme "A New Perspective".

Golden Beech took the top spot, winning photographer Michael Steven Harris a £75 prize.

Michael, from Brighton, said: "As I approached the beautiful beech trees at Chanctonbury Ring I saw that the tracks sloping up and in front of the trees provided a good composition with the sun setting to the left.

"I was about to take the photo when I noticed two small flocks of birds fortuitously flying past – so I waited until there was some separation between them and the trees before I pressed the shutter, resulting in the photo you see here."

And Michael added: "The South Downs National Park is a wonderful place to explore for its varied landscape – from the distinctive serene rolling hills and valleys across the Downs to the breathtaking chalk cliffs and meandering rivers at Seven Sisters.



Buddy Blues by Mike Blacknell

"The same hilly landscape also creates lots of unique weather conditions perfect for photographers and finally, to top it all off, there's picturesque windmills, monuments, castles and lighthouses dotted all about the park!"

Chanctonbury Ring is an Iron Age hillfort that was later used as a Roman religious site.

The earliest known use of the site occurred in the Bronze Age, about

1500 BCE, with the burial of a young woman, who was interred with a bronze dagger beside her.

## Young photographers win prizes



**What could be more beautiful than a blanket of tulips at Arundel Castle on a gorgeous spring day?**

The spectacle was captured by young photographer Ivan Chupryna, who has won the under-10s category in the National Park's youth photo competition.

Eight-year-old Ivan has won a trip to Birdworld, near Farnham.

Ivan's mum Kateryna said: "We came from Ukraine to Brighton since the beginning of the war. Ivan is a very creative boy, as is my six-year-old daughter Sofia. Ivan likes to photograph nature and loves flowers. My children need support and care during this difficult time.

"We arrived in England after the start of the war in Ukraine, but my husband remains in Ukraine. The children are very sad and worried about their father. I try to give children a full childhood, where there is beauty and peace."

Meanwhile, talented Jessica Bowles won the 11 to 17 category with a moovellous image of a cow at Woodingdean, near Brighton, near where she lives.



Fitting the brief of "A New Perspective", the image has won 13-year-old Jessica and her family a trip to **Marwell Zoo** in Hampshire.

Dad John Bowles said: "Jessica said she loves living so close to the South Downs National Park as it is so beautiful and peaceful. She loves going on walks with her mum over the Downs too.

"She likes taking pictures as it records memories as they are great to look back on, especially animals.

"The picture she took makes her laugh every time she sees it, especially the expression on the cow's face."

Watch this space for details of this year's new photo competition with some wonderful prizes and a fresh exciting theme!

## Muslim Hikers brace all weathers in coastal walk event



**More than 150 people from all over the UK and beyond enjoyed a bracing seafront walk along the scenic Seven Sisters.**

The Muslim Hikers group was founded in 2020 during the pandemic as a way for people to come together and enjoy experiences in the countryside.

There were smiles of excitement as the group arrived at the Seven Sisters Country Park visitor centre for a day of rambling and many of the group had never been to the South Downs National Park before.

Ranger Lawrence Leather delivered an interesting talk explaining the site's importance, rich history, and ongoing conservation efforts.

Josh Esan, Engagement and Events Officer for the National Park, said: "Embarking on a journey from Seven Sisters to Birling Gap and back, the day that started with a promising brightness later succumbed to the gentle drizzle, resulting in muddy trails.

"However, the resilient hikers, captivated by the breathtaking beauty of the landscape, remained undeterred. This visit served as an excellent opportunity for them to delve into the essence of the South Downs National Park – its cultural heritage, remarkable diversity, and our nature recovery efforts. The feedback showed the experience had left a lasting impression. From the ease of access, to the breathtaking scenery, many expressed their enjoyment of the visit and voiced their intent to return. We're now working with Muslim Hikers to develop another walk elsewhere in the National Park"



## Secrets of town are revealed



Some of the finds from the excavation by Heritage Eastbourne

### The discovery of a basement wall from over 300 years ago and 18th century sewing pins were among the highlights of an archaeological excavation in Eastbourne.

Eastbourne takes its name from the ancient Bourne settlement and stream which developed into the town we know today.

Archaeologists believe that from the 13th century there were buildings in the Manor Gardens and Parsonage areas of the town that were later cleared when Manor Gardens was created in the mid-18th century.

The excavation was led by Heritage Eastbourne in partnership with the Blue Heart Project and wanted to discover if any trace of these buildings, gardens or the wells that served them survive beneath the ground.

Katherine Buckland, Heritage Engagement Officer for Eastbourne and Lewis Councils, said: "The excavation solved some of the mysteries of Eastbourne as a Downland settlement. The discovery of a basement wall from the 17th century from a house that was demolished almost 300 years ago gives us another clue to piece together the story of what life was like for people living here over the last 1000 years or so.

"A selection of 18th century sewing pins and buckles as well as pottery, clay pipes and animal bone have also provided insight into what the day to day would have been for people living in this Downland settlement. All of the finds will be processed over the next couple of weeks and the report will be available on the Heritage Eastbourne website with sneak peeks of some of the discoveries on social media @HeritageEastbourne."

The Big Dig is run by Eastbourne Borough Council and is part of the Changing Chalk Partnership, which includes the National Park as a partner. The Big Dig aims to uncover the development of a downland settlement from a small farming community to a thriving conurbation through community test-pitting. Changing Chalk is supported by a £2.23m Heritage Lottery Fund grant and is working to restore and protect the internationally rare chalk grassland, as well as bring history to life.

## Amazing chance for planning projects to win awards

**There are less than eight weeks left to submit your nomination for the prestigious 2024 South Downs Design Awards.**

Recognising professional design work in a protected landscape, the awards celebrate projects and professionals that make a standout contribution to the National Park.

The 2024 categories cover residential, non-residential, and conservation projects, as well as future unbuilt projects.

Rafa Grosso Macpherson, Design Officer at the National Park Authority, has shared his four reasons to enter the awards:

- Shortlisted projects and winners will receive public recognition of professionalism at a very high level at the award ceremony and exhibition.
- Shortlisted projects will be featured on the South Downs National Park website, social media and newsletters.
- Winners will receive a specially-designed trophy, beautifully hand-carved in South Downs oak by acclaimed West Sussex-based sculptor, Alison Crowther.
- The 'Future Projects' category winner will receive an **award of £500** as well as the trophy.

Rafa added: "The South Downs Design Awards are only open for entries every five years, so now is the time to get your entry in. Don't miss this wonderful opportunity for professionals to showcase their best work and creativity and be recognised for it!



"The trophies are taking shape and are truly stunning. Carved in oak from the South Downs National Park and using the annual rings and medullary rays as a guide, these trophies emulate the essence of the landscape."

There is no entry fee and the deadline to submit your project is midnight on **Tuesday 30 April 2024**. You

can find the entry criteria [here](#).

We look forward to receiving your submission. Good luck! For entry enquiries, please contact Rafa at [design@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:design@southdowns.gov.uk)

For sponsorship enquiries, contact James Winkworth at [james.winkworth@southdowns.org.uk](mailto:james.winkworth@southdowns.org.uk)

## Go for a walk and win £30!



**Have you tried our immersive audio tour exploring thought-provoking stories and personal reflections about the Sussex Heritage Coast?**

During April and May we're inviting people to try out the We Hear You Now audio trail, which is made up of 15 listening posts across Seven Sisters Country Park. The trail was devised by Alinah Azadeh, writer in residence from 2020 to 2023, along with a clutch of other talented people.

The audio stories are accessed via any smartphone by simply scanning a QR code or tapping for an NFC code. The audio content includes stirring, emotive and sometimes surprising stories covering fiction, poetry and even new mythologies for this world-famous coastline.

Our aim is to get people into the landscape and visit at least three listening posts, then share their thoughts about the experience, what they've learned, and any other feedback.

And you could win a **£30 voucher** to spend at the Seven Sisters Visitor Centre shop. The competition launches on 1 April and finishes on 31 May and entries should be sent to [eventbookings@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:eventbookings@southdowns.gov.uk)

Please include in your entry a photograph of yourself at the listening points and some feedback about the experience (minimum of 75 words and maximum of 300 words) Video testimonials are also welcomed.

The first 20 successful entries will win a single-use voucher that will be emailed to them. Please see the [terms and conditions here](#). Josh Esan, Engagement Officer for the National Park, said: "We're excited to launch our We Hear You Now competition and it couldn't come at a better time with Discover National Parks in April and National Walking Month in May.

"This is an amazing opportunity to explore the country park, learn more about different perspectives on the landscape and take home some goodies from the very well-stocked shop! It's a great reason to get down to Seven Sisters and enjoy an interesting day-out."

A useful guide on the walking experience is available [here](#) and can also be picked up from the visitor centre.

## Win a day-out at museum!



**Located in the heart of the National Park is a museum that offers a unique insight into the region's working past.**

Travel back in time at Amberley Museum and explore the south's industrial heritage, all set within a sprawling former quarry and limeworks.

Did you know the site was used as a set for the James Bond film *A View To A Kill* with Roger Moore?

The museum includes a fascinating film revealing how the site was turned into a movie set to create some very exciting action scenes back in the mid-80s.

Today the museum has over 40 exhibit areas to discover, including a narrow-gauge railway, historic buses, rural crafts and extensive communications displays.

There's something for everyone and it offers the perfect family day-out this spring or summer. There's even a beautiful train station next door if you wanted to leave the car at home!

We've teamed up with Amberley to offer a family day pass for two adults and up to three children. People signing up to the newsletter during March will be automatically entered into the prize draw.

Those who are already signed up can email the answer to this question: "Which actor played the character of May Day in the 1985 film shot at Amberley?" to [newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk) before midnight on 31 March. Sign up to the newsletter [here](#) and see competition T&Cs [here](#).





## 'The job list is neverending' – marking International Women's Day with our ranger Laura



As the National Park marks **International Women's Day** this March, we caught up with Western Downs ranger Laura Tong to get the inside track on her career as a ranger.

### **What made you think of becoming a ranger?**

As soon as I realised that this kind of job existed! I've always loved being outside, watching and learning about wildlife from my earliest childhood years.

I had my first experience of this job whilst completing work experience at school and I immediately knew I'd found my calling. I found it a very tangible experience, I could see what I was doing was having a positive effect and that to me had a lot meaning and felt incredibly rewarding.

### **What's it like being a ranger in the South Downs National Park?**

This is such a good question because your job as a ranger is very much linked by the landscape, habitats and people that you work with and are surrounded by.

Here in the South Downs we are so lucky to have such a wide variety of habitats, it creates this amazing mosaic within the landscape.

This adds to the diversity of our work, whether it be working on chalk grassland, woodland, rivers, farmland or heathland – just to name a few!

There are also engagement activities with schools and local communities, there is fantastic partnership working with a whole array of different NGOs, public bodies and landowners, and there is both project management and practical hands on management too.

For me the diversity in the role is something that I love, no two days are ever the same and there is always something new to learn and discover.

### **Can you describe your typical day?**

This really depends on the time of year.

At the moment it is winter, therefore we are making the most of this time of year to manage scrub and woodlands before bird nesting season starts in March.

This can be carried out with volunteer tasks, contractors or within our own ranger team. A typical volunteer task day involves meeting our volunteers at the workshop, packing up the tools and heading to site where we could be working on a chalk grassland site to remove some (but not all) scrub.

A typical day will also almost always involve some very necessary admin and email checking.

### **What's the best and most difficult part of the ranger job?**

As well as the variety within the job, one of the best parts of the job is working on projects that enable people to access the National Park and connect with nature.

It's becoming more well known that being outside is so vital for our health and wellbeing and everyone has a right to access this amazing landscape.

As we cover large areas, the difficult part of the job is sometimes not having enough time to be able to have as much involvement in some projects as we'd like to. The job list is neverending!

### **What's been the highlight of your ranger career so far?**

I think it has to be finding some of the amazing otter footage on our wildlife cameras.

We knew otters were present from the signs on site, but to have otters and their cubs (who are highly secretively) just running around and playing together on this video footage was really special to see and to share that with others.

### **Why do you love the South Downs?**

For me it's home. I grew up nearby and it's always been a significant area in my life to both visit and live in.

I find it a very warm landscape to be in, the mosaics of different habitats make it very interesting from a landscape and ecological point of view and there are some amazing views and idyllic walks just to top it off.

### **What does International Women's Day mean to you?**

For me this day is about equality, and recognising that our skills and qualities are not gender based and that anyone has the right to reach their maximum potential.

### **What would you say to any youngster thinking of becoming a ranger?**

Firstly I would say "that's amazing!" Secondly, I would direct them to doing some volunteering – this is fantastic firsthand experience of what some of the job entails.

If you're able to commit frequently to volunteering then that's even better. I would also suggest they look at relevant qualifications or apprenticeships that could further their knowledge and skill base. And lastly I would suggest to get out and enjoy the outside and keep that interest ignited!

## Things to do in the South Downs this March

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/](https://southdowns.gov.uk/events/)



- Enjoy an afternoon at [Petersfield Museum](#) and see its exhibition, *Katharine Swailes and Caron Penney: The Language of Weaving*. The duo are leading tapestry artists who are creating works that weave together the rich history of tapestry practices with contemporary design. Swailes and Penney are an integral part of the historical network of women artists and designers in the traditional tapestry weaving art field, which has slowly become recognised for its contribution to contemporary art and design in the UK. Alongside the exhibition, which runs until 1 June, are a series of weaving demonstrations and workshops.
- Calling all art lovers! Head to [Goodwood House](#), near Chichester, on 19 March for an evening talk on women's artists. The talk will be given by Goodwood's curator and include a welcome from The Duchess of Richmond, together with a champagne and canape reception in the state apartments. The Goodwood Collection has works by 18th century female artists including Angelica Kauffman, Anne Damer and Katherine Read, as well as pictures by contemporary artist Holly Freen.
- Head to [Gilbert White House and Gardens](#), in Selborne, for their Open Greenhouse Day on 20 March. The greenhouse will be busy as the propagating team prepare plants for this season's planting and sales. Meet the team, find out about our plant production operation, watch the system in action and ask questions.
- Find out more about the wonderful wildlife of Seaford! [On The Verge](#) and Seaford Natural History Society is putting on a series of talks and the next one is delivered by Lucy Lapwing, at Seaford Baptist Church, at 2.30pm on 23 March. Tickets are £3.
- Visit Seven Sisters Country Park from 27 March to 7 April to enjoy a stunning art exhibition in the beautifully-restored Pump Barn next to the visitor centre. "Meanderings" will feature the work of artists from the [Salt Edge group](#).

### Pic credits

P2 Right Sam Moore; P6 left Bip Mistry; P8 Lilliana Gibbs; P10 (downland) Rebecca Saunders