

SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

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SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK

WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **Giving nature a helping hand** Find out about the community-based projects across the National Park that have received grants to help fight biodiversity loss.
- **Happy Birthday!** The South Downs National Park recently turned 14 – discover what’s been achieved so far for the UK’s youngest National Park.
- **Amazing archaeology** Find out about a Roman temple discovered in a river valley.
- **Competition** Win a family ticket to the UK’s only museum dedicated to telling the story of D-Day.

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

Big boost for nature as grants are announced

Creating new havens for butterflies and barn owls, establishing new wetlands and saving the under-threat juniper tree are among the exciting projects to benefit from a funding boost of over £130,000.

Thirteen community-led projects across Hampshire and Sussex will be receiving a ReNature grant from the South Downs National Park Trust to help restore biodiversity.

It comes as the ReNature initiative enters its third year with an ambitious goal of creating 13,000 hectares of new habitat by 2030 to help wildlife flourish, as well as improving existing nature havens in the National Park.

Among the projects will be creating a new wildflower meadow at Twyford, near Winchester, to help encourage butterflies and small mammals. At Slindon, in West



Sussex, hedgerows will be restored to help bird species, such as blue tits and yellowhammer, while in Lewes work will take place to restore a chalk stream and provide more wetland habitat for species such as dragonflies and lapwings.



At Queen Elizabeth Country Park, near Waterlooville, there will be a concerted effort to bring back the juniper tree, one of Britain’s three native conifer species that has struggled in recent decades across the UK due to diseases and poor seed quality. Adapted to chalk downland, it supports a host of unique insects and fungi, such as the juniper carpet moth, and is an important food source for thrushes and fieldfare. The project will save the country park’s last two juniper trees and plant a wildlife corridor of more than 100 juniper trees.

Jan Knowlson, Biodiversity Officer for the National Park, said: "ReNature is about creating nature everywhere, for everyone, and involves establishing new wildlife havens and improving existing habitats such as chalk grassland, heathland and woodland.

"The biodiversity crisis is not going away – one in six species are now at risk of being lost in Great Britain and the figure from a decade ago was one in 10.

"The time for action is now and that's why these grants are so important.

"The National Park is doing a lot of work with major landowners around establishing new habitats, but there's also an incredible amount of work taking place in the community on smaller-scale projects. Often these smaller projects struggle for funding and that's where a ReNature grant can make a huge difference."

The full list of projects to benefit are:

Churchfield Meadow Biodiversity Project, near Winchester – run by Twyford Valley Conservation CIC, plans are afoot to create a wildflower meadow and improve riverbank management to help encourage small mammals. £14,200

Community Cut and Collect scheme in the Western Downs in Hampshire – provide a cut and collect machine for the local ranger team that will be available to landowners and organisations. The machine encourages the growth of wildflowers to help bees and butterflies. £43,754

Selborne Small Meadows and Grassland Network Project – based at Gilbert White House and Garden, the project will help maintain a wildflower meadow and support other small meadows in the local area through the Selborne Landscape Partnership, which is made up of local farmers. £4,015

Restoration of Jolly Robins pond by Hawley Parish Council, near Liss – restore an overgrown, clogged and barely visible village pond to help biodiversity return. £3,000

Landport Brooks, Lewes – led by Eastbourne Council and the Ouse & Adur Rivers Trust, the project will help restore a chalk stream called the Papermill Cut and create wetland features for a wide range of species, together with public access and interpretation panels. £10,000

Cattle conservation grazing project at Longmoor, near Petersfield – led by Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife



Trust, the initiative is developing fence-free grazing to help maintain the heathland site and encourage reptiles such as the sand lizard. £7,728

Palace Field wildflower meadow, Droxford – led by Droxford Parish Council and Sustainable Droxford, the project will transform a rough grazing area to wildflower meadow to attract pollinators. A barn owl box will also be replaced and improved. £2,440

Woolmer Forest Site of Special Scientific Interest, near Bordon – led by Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, the conservation grazing will be improved by the introduction of no-fence collars. This will help support species that rely on the lowland heathers such as nightjars, woodlarks and Dartford warblers. £10,752

Itford Farm, at Beddingham, near Lewes – led by South Downs Youth Hostel Association (YHA), the funding will help conserve and enhance a nature site with increased access opportunities for the benefit of local schools, youth groups and the wider community. £25,000

Wetland restoration at Brook Farm, Midhurst – funding for project design and feasibility for wetland restoration and creating new habitats for water voles. £6,403

Saving the juniper tree at Queen Elizabeth Forest, Hampshire – the rescue of the last two remaining juniper trees in the forest. An area of the commercial plantation will be cleared, returned to chalk downland, and planted with more than 100 juniper trees. £2,925

Harnessing the power of hedgerows, Slindon, West Sussex – led by Slindon Parish Council, an overgrown hedge will be rejuvenated, removing a wire fence, to create a layered hedge that will provide a wildlife refuge. £2,680

Lórien Rewilding at Steyning, West Sussex – planting new hedgerows, creating new wildlife ponds and reseeded to encourage greater diversity of flowers and grasses. £8,756.14

The ReNature initiative is being led by the National Park Authority in partnership with the South Downs National Park Trust, the official charity for the National Park. Significant funding has been generated through donations and grants from the public and private sector, as well as National Lottery funding.

To help with the fundraising and to donate visit www.southdownstrust.org.uk

Future rounds of applications for ReNature grants may take place. To be put on the notification list please email grants@southdowns.gov.uk

Did you know?

The ReNature initiative has already helped to create over 400 hectares of brand-new wildlife habitat – or almost 1,000 football pitches – such as new ponds, grasslands and wildflower meadows. Over 4,300 hectares of existing habitat has been improved for nature.

Where will art take you?

Uncovering valley's hidden past

Carbon dating has revealed that humans have been living in one corner of the South Downs for well over 3,000 years.



The Meon Valley Archaeology and Heritage Group has uncovered a series of incredible finds near the River Meon in Hampshire.

The group are now working with Winchester University on a complete review of the extensive historical and archaeological evidence in the valley. A recent carbon dating revealed that a Bronze Age burial was 3,391 years old. And scientific analysis of a burial at a Roman temple site has shown it to be a 1,817-year-old female adolescent.

The group's biggest achievement, to date, is the Roman site that includes a hexagonal temple, baths and mausoleum.

John Snow, co-founder of the group, explained: "Our analysis shows the temple was used as a ritual monument. The Roman Temple was located directly above an Iron Age temple.

"This was confirmed by the discovery of skeletons of a female horse and a foal in late Iron Age levels.

"The implications of these equine discoveries are exciting, as they are associated with the goddess Epona. At this site we have amongst the strongest evidence for Epona in the whole of Roman Britain.

"Evidence of pilgrimage is confirmed by burials of animal bones and artefacts around the external points of the hexagonal temple. The Roman baths were situated only 15ft from the temple. The baths were of a traditional design and consisted of four rooms. In the cold room (apodyterium) there was evidence of painted wall-plaster, and it included at least one nude female figure with drapery and a blue/grey background. In terms of quality, it's equal to the best late Roman painting in Britain.

"The female figure may represent a nymph or water deity. This discovery enhances the ritual association of the River Meon."

John added: "We're currently engaged in a long programme of processing the large number of finds from the Roman Temple site. It's estimated this will take a year or so and we hope the results will provide an insight into why so many people visited and undertook feasting on the site. Our geophysical surveys methods are our main tool in discovering hidden archaeology in the landscape. "Volunteers enjoy working in the open air, surrounded by the historic landscape and together we have discovered important sites such as the Roman hexagonal temple site."

To find out more about the group and their work visit www.mvahg.co.uk



The popular Sussex Art Shuttle returns this spring and will again link Towner Eastbourne, Charleston in Firle, Seven Sisters Country Park and Charleston's arts space in central Lewes, where a fantastic season of new exhibitions opens to coincide.

Route 39 will run with four services a day, Friday, Saturday and Sunday until 27 October. You can hop on for a single journey for just £2 or hop on and off for a day for £3.50.

Since its autumn 2023 debut, the route has connected over 1,000 visitors per month. The scenic journey includes iconic landmarks like the Seven Sisters cliffs and Cuckmere Valley, alongside charming stops at Alfriston and Litlington, where there are plenty of opportunities to explore local cuisine, beverages, and independent shops.

The shuttle is being part-funded by Arts Council England and South East Museums Development.

Joe Hill, Director and CEO, Towner Eastbourne, said: "Visiting the area by bus is a fantastic opportunity to explore the wider region and see some of the best culture Sussex has to offer this season."

Nathaniel Hepburn, Director, Charleston, said: "The return of the Sussex Art Shuttle opens up new opportunities for visitors to engage with the vibrant cultural scene of the region. We're delighted to be connecting new audiences with our new season of spring exhibitions, not to mention the breathtaking landscapes surrounding them.

Find out more at www.charleston.org.uk/sussex-art-shuttle/



Opportunity to help shape Park

Heath basking for mental health



Spring is often considered to be a period of new life and fresh starts when things wake up. This makes it a perfect time to tune your senses to connect with nature.

It's well known that spending time in green spaces can benefit both your mental and physical wellbeing and that nature can make us feel calm, joyful and help with concentration. You may well have heard of forest bathing, an ancient Japanese relaxation method of being calm and quiet in amongst the trees. Since we're blessed with many heaths in Hampshire and West Sussex, our heathland ranger team are encouraging a slight twist on forest bathing, go heathland basking this month!

Sometimes all it takes is a few minutes to feel the benefits, so we've come up with our top tips.

Stop and listen to the bird song. Research by the Natural History Museum has shown that listening to bird sounds can offer relief from mental fatigue and stress. This time of year the birds are at their most vocal. Listen out for the 'teacher, teacher' of the great tit, or the unmistakable sound of the Chiff chaff, a sure sign of spring! Out on the heaths, listen out for the musical notes of the woodlark as it sings on the wing, its latin name *Lullula Arborea* gives you an idea of the 'lululu' to listen out for. The woodlark nests on the grounds on our heaths, so make sure to stick to the paths!

Touch can help us feel calm and balanced. Our native UK reptiles are starting to emerge from hibernation, and on a sunny day will begin to bask on bare sandy parts of our heaths. Why don't you try the same, stop briefly and stand or sit to feel the warmth of the sun on a spring day or feel the rough bark of an old oak or birch tree?

Noticing the small things: our heathland habitat is often One of our favourite insects to look out for is the beautiful Green Tiger Beetle, look out for a flash or iridescent green with yellow spots on their back on sandy tracks.

Enjoy the bright yellow flowers of the gorse which often line paths. Not only does the gorse bring some springtime sunshine to the heaths, but the flowers also smell like coconut making it one for the senses, although we don't recommend trying to touch it! Happy heathland basking!

Why not join one of our ranger led walks?



Are you interested in helping to shape the future direction of the South Downs National Park?

The National Park Authority is striving to bring the voices of communities, sectors or groups whose voices are not often heard into our discussions.

These include but are not limited to people in the commercial or land management sectors, young people and people from underrepresented communities who are often users of the National Park but are not well represented in our formal structures.

We are keen for someone to add their voice to our Policy and Resources Committee. We are inviting applications for a new co-opted member to be involved in our discussions and who can bring their own perspective, skills and experience and influence our decision-making.

Who are we looking for?

We are looking for someone who has a keen interest in the environment, is passionate about access to the landscape, and who will be able to bring their own perspective, skills and experience to the Authority.

You will have a seat at the table in our committee discussions and strategic workshops, along with participation in other relevant events and access to the expert staff of the National Park Authority.

To reflect the time commitment (estimated at about 2 days per month) co-opted members will be eligible to claim an allowance of £3100.90 per annum (paid monthly), as well as reimbursement for travel and other reasonable expenses when participating in Authority work.

The deadline is Sunday, 14 April and we're really keen to hear from a wide spectrum of people.

For details on how to apply visit

www.southdowns.gov.uk/job/co-optee-member/

Following an initial selection process, we will meet shortlisted individuals online in late April /early May 2024 so we can introduce them to some of our senior team to further discuss the role and how they may contribute.

Happy 14th birthday to the South Downs National Park!



The creation of a National Park in the South Downs was first mooted in the 1920s when public concern was mounting about the threats to the downland.

It would take decades before calls for a National Park along the ever-expanding south coast conurbation gathered pace and, following two major public inquiries, hundreds of meetings and passionate campaigning from local communities, the South Downs National Park finally came into being on 31 March, 2010.

The dream of many became a working reality when 1,600km² of England's most-cherished lowland landscape was designated for the nation as a special place for natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage.

Fourteen years on it's still as special.

As we mark the 14th birthday of your National Park, we look at 14 success stories for the UK's youngest National Park.

Wildlife bouncing back



There's been some incredible stories of birds, mammals, invertebrate and plant species bouncing back. It's largely down to improvements in habitat, more nature-friendly farming, creation of new habitat, some re-introductions and a concerted effort between

rangers, local communities and partners. Just some examples include otters returning and water voles thriving after reintroduction on the River Meon, farmer-led projects to support farmland birds such as the grey partridge, the return of short-eared owls to Seven Sisters Country Park, and pearl bordered fritillaries returning to downland hotspots. There's still a long way to go to tackle biodiversity loss, but there are the green shoots of recovery in many places.

Access for all



Miles Without Stiles routes have been created for people with limited mobility and families with pushchairs, together with a fleet of mobility scooters at key sites. The Egrets Way in East Sussex and Centurion Way in West Sussex have helped to connect busy urban areas to the heart of the National Park. Well over 50km of new or

resurfaced cycle and multi-user paths have been installed and the South Downs has over 3,300km of public rights of way – the largest network of public paths of any National Park.

Local Plan

The award-winning South Downs Local Plan, covering 2014 to 2033, replaced more than 1,000 overlapped policies that were in existence across the area of the National Park with 92 clear policies covering all aspects of planning. The Local Plan supports delivery of vital "ecosystem services", which are the services provided by the environment, such as clean water and air, dark night skies and tranquillity. The affordable housing policy prioritises on-site provision of rented affordable homes.

Restoring lowland heaths

It's a wildlife oasis rarer than the rainforest and home to some of Britain's most endangered reptile, amphibian and bird species. Our Heathlands Reunited project has conserved and enhanced 23,825 hectares – or 18,000 football pitches – of lowland heath. An independent scientific assessment revealed the initiative was "significant" in restoring the ecological condition of the habitat.

Check out the full list of success stories here.

Tim Slaney, Chief Executive (Interim) of National Park Authority, said: "As we mark the anniversary of the creation of the South Downs National Park it's important to look back as well as look forward, particularly this year as the UK's National Park movement celebrates its 75th birthday.



"Fourteen years is a comparatively short time and we're still a young National Park, so there's rightly a lot of pride in what's been achieved so far for both nature and people. None of it would have been possible without the goodwill, dedication and support from local communities, farmers, volunteers and partners who have all worked with us to ensure this treasured landscape can continue being special and also evolve.

"Having a 'green lung' in the busy south east is more important than ever and I'm proud that the National Park continues to be a place where nature and people come together. There will be many challenges ahead, but we will continue to do everything we can to protect and enhance this world-class landscape for future generations to enjoy."

“Spring might actually be here”



Family walks at St Catherine's Hill, Winchester



Assistant Ranger Ethan Purdy shares his thoughts and reflections as spring starts to unfold.

I don't know about everyone else, but it feels like spring might actually be here. Almost. This time

of year, brings a whole host of feeling, which are hard to explain – but I'll give it a go.

When watching an orchestra, before they start, there is a quiet murmur of chatter, as if beneath the surface of the ground, small conversations in hushed voices. Then, all of a sudden, they begin to tune - and the crowd falls silent. The swell begins with a single note cutting through the quiet. Beginning with an oboe, the sound travels across the hall, all the other instruments joining in the sea of tonality. It's one of my favourite sounds in the world. A wash of music filling the air. It's so incredibly exciting.

The world right now feels a bit like that orchestra. Over the winter, the hushed voices have been the slumbering flora and fauna, and yet now, the tuning has begun. The orchestra of our island has begun its performance for the year, and day by day, each instrument has begun to join the symphony. All it takes is stepping into the National Park, to see the changes. Butterflies are starting to fly, and buds are beginning to bloom. Music seems to be filling the air. With longer days and a sun attempting to be brighter, the heavy, sodden coat of winter may not be fully removed yet, but it's at least beginning to slip.

Here in the Western Downs, in Hampshire, we've been putting the finishing touches on our winter jobs. It's a good feeling, looking back on a season well-spent, especially when the winter's been a cantankerous soul, throwing endless rain and short days in the way. Despite the best efforts of winter, we've ticked off a fair few tasks over the past months, the biggest being the Hampshire Hedge Project. Working with the CPRE, we've begun planting a brand-new hedgerow, a highway and haven for wildlife, stitching together the New Forest and the South Downs. And that's not all – the team's been busy planting

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another 250 metres of hedgerow around our patch, further providing habitat for a host of life.

Furthermore, we've had a brilliant success in restoring a historic flint and clay lined pond adjacent to the South Downs Way, near Winchester, and two minor restorations near Greatham. These will provide water in the coming months when this becomes a far scarcer resource; far away as that idea may currently seem!



In keeping with spring, we've also discovered new life in the Park. New populations of hazel dormice (*pictured left*) and harvest mice have been found, and changes in management have been

made to protect them to the best of our ability.

Not all these successes have been purely for nature either. The team have engaged in Youth Action events, including a Besom Broom making with Ranger Paul Bushell (it's a traditional form of heathland management). In addition, a bridleway in Binstead has been signed off, opening a whole new area of the National Park, for many people to explore.

Finally, for climate, we have been making moves to increase our use of electric tools. This has come into fruition in the form of solar charging for batteries.

Admire views from safe distance



Visitors to the National Park's stunning coastline are being urged to stay safe after two significant cliff collapses in the space of just two weeks.

With visitor numbers set to increase as the weather improves, people are being urged to stay well away from cliff edges and bases.

Cliff erosion is a natural process and part of the evolution of the coastline. As well as the risk to those walking on top of cliffs, it can also present dangers to those on the beach below.

People are also reminded to check tide times as it's possible to get cut off by the incoming tide or be forced to walk too close to the base of the cliffs to avoid the rising sea water.

Claire Onslow, who manages Seven Sisters Country Park, said: "We would always advise people to stay well away from cliff edges and bases and admire from a safe distance. Given the unstable nature of chalk, sections of cliff can collapse without warning."

If visitors see anyone in danger or witness someone who has fallen, they are urged to call 999 immediately and ask for the Coastguard and not attempt to rescue them.

Last chance to enter the prestigious Design Awards!

The clock is counting down to the deadline for nominations for the 2024 South Downs Design Awards.

With just a few weeks to go until the closing date, people are being urged to get their nominations in for planning projects that showcase outstanding and innovative design and architecture in the National Park.



The categories are:

Residential – includes completed extensions, single buildings, small and large housing developments, and visitor accommodation.

Non-residential – includes completed commercial, industrial, farming, infrastructure, recreation, and leisure developments.

Conservation – includes completed historic parks and gardens, historic buildings, monuments, as well as excellent craftsmanship.

Future projects – includes projects that celebrate distinction in unbuilt projects on paper and the potential for positive contribution to the National Park, its communities and the planet.

Fifteen projects have been nominated so far and nominations are particularly needed for the non-residential, conservation and future projects categories.

Winners will receive a specially designed trophy, beautifully hand-carved in South Downs oak by acclaimed West Sussex-based sculptor, Alison Crowther



Mike Hughes, Planning Director (Interim) for the National Park, said: "Good design is an integral part of good planning and contributes to the long-term vitality of our local environments and communities."

"These awards are about celebrating exceptional projects past and present, as well as looking ahead to the future and investigating new ideas for development in the National Park.

"The competition is wide open and we're looking forward to seeing the breadth of nominations."

The deadline is 30 April. The shortlist will be announced this summer, with a glittering awards ceremony taking place in the autumn.

Nominate by visiting www.southdowns.gov.uk/designawards

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY Competition! Win a family ticket to The D-Day Story museum



Troops were usually hidden in camps in woods, or sometimes as here were camouflaged alongside hedgerows.

Did you know this year marks the 80th anniversary of the D-Day landings?

The South Downs and surrounding area have many connections to what was to be the decisive campaign of the Second World War. Some of the better-known locations are the embarkation points where troops boarded the ships and landing craft that would take them to Normandy, such as Portsmouth and Shoreham. Those troops had previously been waiting at "Marshalling Area" camps that were slightly inland, either within or close to the National Park boundary.

Most of these camps were concealed within woodland some distance from towns and cities, to hide them from spies or enemy reconnaissance aircraft.

Earlier in the war, many of those troops had been based in what is now the National Park. A significant proportion of the British, Canadian, American and other Allied troops who landed in Normandy on or after D-Day had not previously been in action. They had spent months, sometimes even years, training and preparing for battle. The South Downs offered many suitable spaces for carrying out such training exercises.

To mark the anniversary, we've teamed up with The **D-Day Story Museum** in Southsea to offer a family ticket.

The museum is home to Landing Craft Tank 7074, the last surviving LCT which carried up to ten tanks on D-Day.

There will be an extensive events and activities throughout 2024 to commemorate the 80th anniversary including talks, livestreams, and tours. Visit www.thedaystory.com/events. A national **commemoration** takes place in Portsmouth on 5 June.

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

Things to do in the South Downs this April

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/



- Are you aged 16-25 and want to make a difference for nature and the environment? Join the National Park team for a [Youth Action Day](#) on 10 April. We meet at **Lewes Railway Station** and walk 10 minutes to the Lewes Railway Land Trust nature reserve. During the afternoon, we will be using iNaturalist, which is a recording app for nature enthusiasts. You don't need to be an expert in identification, just interested! The app is a great way to help you learn about nature if you are just starting out and a great way of helping us identify key species in the South Downs National Park. This event is part of a world-wide, annual event called the **City Nature Challenge**.
- A new series of creative study walks are taking place this spring, exploring the **history, geology and archaeological landscape** at Beachy Head, near Eastbourne. The first in the monthly trio of walks kicks off in April, while in May, monthly creative writing workshops also make a welcome return.

The **Fossils, Flags and Ancient Features on Beachy Head** series begins with a Cow Gap, Gideon and Mrs Mantell: Fossils & Feminism walk on Monday 15 April. Gideon Mantell was a palaeontologist, and his wife Mary a fossil collector and scientific illustrator, who is credited with discovering the first evidence of an Iguanodon in Sussex. On Monday 20 May, the second creative study walk, entitled Communications from the Headland: Signallers and Structures, will investigate two centuries of communications archaeology on the headland, while working out how to identify the physical structural remains on the ground. Book tickets [here](#).

- Discover the [Eggcellent Adventure Trail](#) at Seven Sisters Country Park, near Seaford. Pick up an activity sheet from the visitor centre and follow the clues to track down wildlife species. There's a small **chocolate** for finishing! The trail is open until 12 April
- Did you know that the swallow flies back to the UK in April and the 15th is traditionally known as **Swallow Day** in England? A [swallow-themed walk](#) will take place from Langham Brewery, West Sussex, on 13 April.

Pic credits

P1 Buddie Blues by Mike Blacknell; P1 Lapwing by Tim Squire; P3 left Meon Valley Heritage Group; P3 right Thomas Broadhead; P4 right Emma Varley; P5 left Guy Edwardes; P5 otter Ellie Burgin; P7 right D-Day Story Museum, Portsmouth.



GO FOR A WALK AND WIN £30!

Have you tried our immersive We Hear You Now audio tour? During April and May, we're inviting you to go for a walk at Seven Sisters and visit three of the 15 listening posts, where you will hear thought-provoking stories and personal reflections about the Sussex Heritage Coast.

Share your thoughts about the experience, what you learned and any other feedback for a chance to win a £30 voucher to spend at the Visitor Centre.

To enter, send a photo of yourself at a listening post, and between 75 and 300 words about your experience, to eventbookings@southdowns.gov.uk.

Look out for these plaques on your walk!



Scan to find out more about We Hear You Now, devised by former Seven Sisters Writer in Residence Alinah Azadeh.

SEVEN SISTERS
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