

SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

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SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK

WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **Raising a toast to climate action!** Wine production is growing every year in the National Park – find out how vineyards are doing their bit to help the planet in our warming climate.
- **Health and wellbeing** Find out about a new round of grants to help community groups.
- **Archaeology special** Discover the fascinating, and heart-wrenching, story of the Racton Man.
- **Win a hilltop cabin holiday!** Enjoy a getaway to the stunning Chantry Farm.

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

Vine-tastic! Wine producers embrace climate action

Vineyards across the South Downs are embracing climate action to produce gorgeous glasses of fizz more sustainably.

From solar panels, to energy-efficient equipment, rainwater harvesting and less fertilisers, producers in one of the UK's winemaking hubs are finding innovative ways to do their bit for the planet.

It comes as the South Downs National Park is one of the fastest-growing wine regions in Europe, with a 90 per cent increase in vineyard coverage over the past decade and an average of five new vineyards planted every year.

The National Park's sun-soaked slopes and chalky soils, reminiscent of northern France, are perfect for growing grapes, particularly to make sumptuous sparkling wines that rival some of the best in the world in quality, complexity and taste.



Seven vineyards in and around the South Downs are now benefitting from climate action grants.

The funding has come from West Sussex local authorities – comprising Arun, Chichester, Horsham and Mid

Sussex District Councils, as well as West Sussex County



Council and the South Downs National Park Authority – while the South Downs Trust, the official charity for the National Park, has been administering the fund.

To tie in with English Wine Week last month, extra grant funding is being made available to help vineyards get involved in climate action.

Chris Hannon, Sustainable Business Lead for the South Downs National Park, said: "The South Downs has become one of Britain's premier winemaking regions and it's a sector that is growing quickly, in part because of climate change and warmer summers.

"It's important that viticulture grows in an environmentally-sustainable way and that's where this funding can really help.

"It's been wonderful working closely with our forward-thinking local authority partners to support producers and wineries, who are really keen to incorporate sustainability and nature-based solutions to create these wonderful wines."



Among the grant beneficiaries so far have been:

The Rowfant Vineyard, near Crawley – 2,500-litre rainwater harvesting system and installation of an off-grid solar kit.

Kinsbrook Vineyards, near Pulborough – A new defoliator to remove excess leaves from the vines with the aim to naturally reduce fungi.

Tinwood Estate, near Chichester – Cover cropping in the vineyard alleyways to improve soil health and reduce the need for fertilisers.

Wiston Estate Winery – Installation of a more energy-efficient air compressor (used to crush grapes) and purchase of re-useable Velcro straps to replace plastic pallet wrap for pallet wine storage.

Nutbourne Vineyards, near Pulborough – Roof-mounted solar energy system to include panels, inverter, batteries, electrical power grid converter, and power diverter as part of aim to become a carbon-neutral business.

Roebuck Estates – Little Brockwood Farm, near Petworth – Installation of biodiversity pond to help wildlife and aid the flow of cold air away from the vines.

The Ghost at The Feast, Chichester – New equipment to allow the business to run a closed-loop bottling system on-site including a steamer, rinser and bottle trees. They are aiming to produce the first wine bottled within Chichester City walls.

Art Tukker, who runs Tinwood Estate, said: "The insects, bees and other species feeding on the flourishing flowers in between our vines is wonderful to see!"

Michael Kennedy, CEO of Roebuck Estates, said: "The climate action grant has allowed us to bring forward our plans to build a biodiversity pond in one of our sites. With the planting of a number of native plant species, we expect to encourage a whole host of insect, mammal and reptile life back into our vineyard, at a time when nature has been sorely challenged across the English countryside."

Some £50,000 has been invested in grants across these projects. A limited funding pot remains and producers who are interested in applying can contact Miriam Swan at grants@southdowns.gov.uk

Funding is subject to a grants panel and open to vineyards, wineries and/or grape distillers within the administrative boundary of Arun, Chichester, Horsham or Mid Sussex District Councils.

Best picnic spots this July



Homemade quiche, buttery pork pies, cheese scones, a sumptuous Victoria Sponge, fresh strawberries and maybe even a glass of ice-cold sparkling South Downs wine.

Having a picnic with friends and loved ones on a warm summer's day, all while enjoying good conversation and an inspiring view, is one of the joys of July.

So, to mark National Picnic Month, we're sharing some of our favourite spots for a picnic in the National Park...

Swanbourne Lake

If you're looking for a tranquil waterside spot for a picnic followed by a stunning downland walk, this is it!

Just a stone's throw from the busy castle and high street in Arundel is this picturesque lake, which lies in the lower part of a deep steep-sided valley that has been eroded into the chalk bedrock.

With 15 rowing boats available for hire, this would be a lovely spot for a romantic picnic for two!

The lake is home to a variety of waterfowl, which children will love feeding (with seed purchased from the ice cream kiosk). On a sunny day, you'll be able to spot fish swimming in the crystal-clear water.

After your lakeside picnic, why not explore the expansive surrounding downland and enjoy the views from the 18th century Hiorne Tower?

Stansted Forest

For those summer days when you want to escape the heat, why not try a forest picnic?

Just a short walk from Rowlands Castle railway station is this impressive woodland, a remnant of the most westerly part of the ancient forest of Arundel.

In 1781 the estate was sold to Richard Barwell who summoned Capability Brown to redesign the park and gardens.

The woodlands are rich in wildlife, including many specialist insects such as the tanner beetle and a host of fungi including the extremely rare "mock oyster" that's only found in a few other sites nationally. Definitely not one for your picnic owing to its foul-smelling odour!

[Find out more picnic spots here.](#)

"I can't tell you how happy everyone has been here"



More than 230 people from across the region have enjoyed exploring the inspirational natural beauty of the South Downs National Park, thanks to a grants scheme.

Seventeen organisations and community groups from Sussex and Hampshire benefitted from the National Park Authority's Health and Wellbeing Travel Grants.

The initiative was launched to help local community groups make the most of the tranquil and wildlife-rich landscape on their doorstep.

Following lots of positive feedback, the scheme is returning for a second year, with a particular focus on helping groups who may not have access to the National Park and might struggle with transport costs.

Among the groups benefitting this year included:

- **Arts on Prescription** – providing creative activities to enhance mental health and wellbeing in St Leonards-on-Sea.
- **Crawley Care Collaborative** – supporting patients with health conditions and disabilities in the Crawley area.
- **Explore the Arch** – providing community arts projects in Sussex.
- **Arun Sunshine Group** – supporting adults with learning difficulties in Littlehampton.
- **Age UK** – supporting older people in Brighton and Hove.
- **ADHD & U** – supporting adults and children with ADHD in Gosport.
- **Sanctuary** – helping people seeking refuge in the Eastbourne area.
- **FSN Charity** – helping disadvantaged young people in Hastings, St Leonards, Rother and Wealden.

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Among the most popular places visited were Seven Sisters Country Park, Queen Elizabeth Country Park, Truleigh Hill and Stanmer Park.

Arts on Prescription used the grant to take 25 people to the picturesque Cuckmere Valley and Seven Sisters Country Park.



Tara Reddy, Project Director and Founder at Arts on Prescription, said: "We are a volunteer-led organisation working with very socially-isolated people, many of whom have been excluded through their disabilities. This grant provided the opportunity to visit a beautiful place and everyone felt uplifted and included – we had tears of joy and laughter on the trip!"

There were a flurry of other positive comments including:

"We were able to take isolated and lonely people who would never go to these amazing places out in a mini-bus and show them the wonders of the countryside and the huge benefits for their mental and physical health."

"It supported people to build confidence and consider ways to participate and engage in social activities again. Several commented on how they had forgotten how nice it was to be outside, walking in nature."

"More than 60 Ukrainian refugees were able to spend an amazing time in nature and to take a break from their problems. I can't describe how happy they have been."



Kate Drake, Health and Wellbeing Officer for the National Park, said: "It's been wonderful to witness the impact that being in the National Park in these amazing green spaces can have on so many people."

"National Parks are part of the nation's support system for health and wellbeing and this scheme has proven how successful these outdoor experiences can be."

"Transport continues to be a barrier for some groups, so I'm really pleased we're launching a second year of this scheme to help more people have an uplifting and restorative day-out surrounded by nature."

"I'm looking forward to seeing what interest we get now that this initiative is becoming more well-known."

The travel grants are up to the value of £250 to cover transport costs.

The grants are being funded by the National Park Authority, with additional support from the South Downs Trust, the official charity of the National Park.

Find out more and apply for a grant by visiting www.southdowns.gov.uk/health-wellbeing or email healthandwellbeinggrant@southdowns.gov.uk

New Director is appointed



A new director has been appointed at the National Park Authority to lead on business partnerships and broaden income to help accelerate nature restoration, increase access and fight climate change.

With two decades of wide-ranging experience in the commercial, fundraising and communications sectors, James Winkworth is excited to become Director of Growth and Organisational Development.

James is passionate about the South Downs becoming a UK leader in green finance, with businesses of all sizes being able to invest in exemplar biodiversity schemes in the National Park.

James brings considerable acumen in income generation, having led the National Park's official charity, The South Downs Trust, for the past seven years. Building the charity from zero to a £2m organisation, it's now one of the largest National Park-based charities in the UK.

The charity has enabled tens of thousands of schoolchildren to connect with the National Park and helped to deliver over 70,000 new trees and 160 football pitches of new wildflower meadows.

James is also passionate about positioning the National Park as a key delivery partner in local government and reorganisation – championing the significant role the South Downs can play in meeting the region's biodiversity and net-zero targets.

Living his entire life on the edge of the National Park in Aldershot, Hampshire, and with a life-long love of wildlife and walking, James can't wait to get started.

"It's a huge honour and privilege to be taking on this role in a region to which I have such close affinity," said James, who first discovered his love of nature through his father's love of landscape paintings in and around the South Downs.

"My one big message is 'we're open for business'. We've already seen the hugely positive impact that high-integrity business partnerships can have on nature restoration in the National Park – from restoring wetlands and creating new woodlands – and I think we've only scratched the surface of what we can achieve.

"It's an exciting time for National Parks as there's so much we want to achieve."

When he's not working, James enjoys walks with his wife and children and is currently completing the Purbeck Way in Dorset. He's also an avid gardener and sea swimmer.

Upgrades for Butser Hill



The highest point on the South Downs chalk ridge is being improved for visitors.

Improvement works to Butser Hill car park started last week and are expected to last for around six weeks.

The work is being carried out by Hampshire County Council, which owns and manages Queen Elizabeth Country Park.

These much-needed upgrades will make the car park safer, more accessible, and more in keeping with the beautiful surroundings of the nature reserve and ancient monument which include a number of ancient burial mounds.

The updates include:

- A safer one-way system
- Clear signage and marked parking bays
- Landscaping and planting to help the car park blend into its surroundings
- Repairs to the road verges leading up to the car park
- Fencing to prevent parking on the South Downs Way

What you need to know during the works?

- The main car park will be closed for three weeks from 7 July while the works are carried out.
- Temporary parking for around 25 cars will be available next to Butser Kiosk.
- Parking will be limited throughout the project, so please consider exploring the other areas of Queen Elizabeth Country Park, where there is plenty of parking available.

The project is being supported by the National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative and the National Park Authority.

A spokesperson for the county council said: "Thank you for your patience while we carry out these improvements. We're looking forward to welcoming you back to a much-improved Butser Hill experience very soon."

At 271m, Butser Hill is one of the crown jewels of the National Park and a remaining fragment of a much larger ancient chalk grassland habitat that once stretched across the region.

Who was the Racton Man?



People have lived in the South Downs for at least 5,000 years and so much of its archaeology is still being discovered and studied. Anooshka Rawden looks at the fascinating and heart-

wrenching story of the Racton Man.

Imagine dying, in a fight to retain your leadership. You are perhaps in your late 40s or 50s, perhaps older, and as you've got older, there is competition for your position. You've fought before, your body bearing well-healed fractures from the past. And you've won. But younger men seek to take your place...

Your elbow is sliced by a sharp blade, detaching bone. Your nerves severed. A stab wound to the armpit. Blood vessels seeping.

Your grave is in the downland, where you once walked the chalk scarps and the coastal plains. Buried with care (possibly under a mound, long since plough lost) as a sign of your bravery and status and consistent with the respect you held in life. With you is a dagger with an elaborately riveted handle.

So lies Racton Man. Waiting.

Fast forward to 1989, when a metal detectorist discovered a dagger blade and a number of rivets at a site near Westbourne in West Sussex. The discovery resulted in an excavation of the site, which in turn revealed a crouched burial, lying on its left side. The remains are boxed and carefully stored.



Archaeological discoveries – each and every one – has a story to tell, but those stories sometimes wait until science and technology can turn a key in the lock of discovery. Racton Man waited almost 30 years until Bronze Age specialist, Dr Stuart Needham, visited the Collections Discovery Centre at Fishbourne Roman Palace, to visit collections cared for by The Novium Museum.

Here was Racton Man, boxed, contained, but ready to tell his story.

Thanks to Dr. Needham, James Kenny (Archaeology Officer for Chichester District Council), The Novium Museum, and specialists from the Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre and Durham University, the story of Racton Man unfolded. Radiocarbon dating suggested he died sometime between 2300BC – 2150BC.

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In life, his diet had been rich in meats, and physically he was tall and imposing, possibly over 6ft tall in life and of a robust and athletic build.

His body wasn't without the markers of illness and aging, with signs of frequent sinus infections, tooth decay and wear, dental abscess and spinal degeneration. And it also showed signs of previous injury, with well healed fractured ribs.

Buried clearly with care – his head may have rested on a pillow made of organic material with his body had likely been buried in a wooden coffin - his dagger was the only object to accompany him. And the dagger tells its own story.

The blade, along with 26 rivets would have formed an elaborate weapon, the hilt rivet-studded and thanks to the work of Dr Needham and a team of specialists, is now understood to be among the earliest bronze daggers to have been found in Europe, standing as it does at the transition between copper and bronze technologies.

The fact it was the only object found buried in the grave also speaks volumes – this dagger symbolised something significant. Other weapons were not needed to accompany this man as this single object spoke of power, prestige and prominence.

And how did Racton Man die? The wounds discovered on his preserved bones speak of violence.

With no signs of healing, the injury to the elbow suggests his arm raised and bent, probably to protect his head, while the secondary injury via the armpit suggests strikes made in quick succession.

Why Racton Man's life ended in violence, we cannot be sure, but a leadership contest through combat is a possibility, especially when we consider the potential of a dagger in such one-to-one combat over its usefulness in warfare.

The dagger points to a man who stood on many edges – life and death to preserve his status, and the transition into the Bronze Age. We do not know if the dagger played a role in Racton Man's death, but it was most certainly a symbol of his life.

Find out more about the archaeology of the South Downs by visiting the Collections Discovery Centre at **Fishbourne Roman Palace** and **The Novium Museum** in Chichester.



Images courtesy of The Novium Museum and Fiona Mills

It's okay to not be okay – and the benefits of National Parks



To mark Men's Health Week this summer, we're focusing on the benefits of getting out into nature for the guys.

A wide body of research shows that lots of men still struggle to talk about their health – and mental health in particular.

Men's Health Week takes place in June every year and is all about breaking down social stigmas and encouraging men to take charge of their health.

The need to raise awareness is profound. Four in five suicides are by men, with suicide the biggest cause of death for men under 35. Around 50 per cent of men in the UK say they have struggled with mental health difficulties, but a much lower percentage have sought support.

According to BUPA, a third of men surveyed said they wouldn't know where to turn to for advice and support.

It's a complex issue and National Parks don't have all the answers, but we do know that getting outside and connecting with nature can do wonders for both mental and physical health.

National Parks are the natural health service and growing research shows that spending time in green, nature-rich places is where the brain performs best. It reduces stress and anxiety by calming the nervous system and you'll benefit from a flood of feel-good endorphins like serotonin.

A personal journey to wellness



Here Andy, an Assistant Ranger for the South Downs National Park, shares his own experience:

Having graduated from my degree in Conservation Biology I then ended up, intentionally or otherwise, working for myself as a freelance photographer.

This came with its benefits, and I did this for a number of years whilst living in London, but ultimately it

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wasn't for me, then Covid arrived and put the brakes on the business completely.

This pushed me to the decision to move out of London and try to pursue the career I had originally intended for myself. Changing my career and choosing to work outside, as a Ranger, has brought about a significant and very noticeable improvement to my mental health.

Stepping away from the pressure and isolation of working for myself, often in very busy and stressful environments, has given me the space I needed to reconnect and achieve a sense of purpose.

Being outdoors daily – working in a team, breathing fresh air, feeling the sun, exercising my body and focussing in on the details that nature has to offer all helping to create the perfect cocktail for a marked improvement in my mood and the "ups-and-downs".

The physical activity, combined with a more defined work/life balance, has also helped ease anxiety and sharpen my focus, helping me to find much more enjoyment in my life. It's been more than just a change in work; it's felt like reclaiming a part of my identity.

To anyone that is going through their own struggles, whatever they may be, I would implore you to try to get out in nature, be it in your garden, a local park or out on the Downs. Spend a minute listening to bird song, plant some wildflower seed, put up a birdbox, or just go exploring – and you'll be surprised how quickly nature starts to heal.

Simple tips to help your wellbeing

- Take a 20/30 minute walk in a natural space – it could be your local park, the beach or the National Park.
- If you're feeling more energetic, go for a run or cycle in a natural space. You could even do your own outdoor workout by doing a few press-ups, burpees or planks!
- Notice – step away from digital devices and use your senses to notice nature. Can you hear the birdsong? Can you smell the trees and flowers?
- Take a moment to pause and reflect. Just the simple act of sitting down in a natural space and giving yourself five or 10 minutes to slow down your thoughts. You could even try a guided meditation or read a book while admiring a nice view.
- Talk to someone! It can be so easy to bottle everything up inside and sometimes it can make the issue grow and grow. Go for a walk with a close friend or family member who you feel comfortable opening up to.
- Look up! You'll be surprised what you see – birds, clouds, stars in the sky, the moon, the sun. Great to build perspective!
- Take photographs and enjoy the details of nature like landscapes, leaves, flowers, views, trees, insects. Photography can be a wonderful way of recording your experiences and looking back on the joy!

Win a stay in a hilltop cabin!

From ambassador to ranger...



For World Female Ranger Day, we catch up with Assistant Ranger Kirsty Ferris, who went from being a volunteer youth ambassador for National Parks to becoming a fully-fledged ranger.

Why did you want to become a National Park ranger?

Becoming a National Park ranger felt like a natural path for me. The outdoors has always been my happy place. I wanted to give something back to the landscapes I've spent so much time exploring and appreciating. It's incredibly rewarding to help protect these spaces and ensure others can enjoy them just as much as I have.

What was your own journey to becoming a ranger?

During college I decided I wanted to become a ranger, so I applied to do a degree in British Wildlife Conservation and started volunteering with the South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service every Friday. In 2018 I became a youth ambassador for the park and got to take part in lots of exciting projects to help encourage more young people to get involved. The highlight for me was helping to create youth action days, where young people from different backgrounds get together to learn about and help nature, these events are still happening now.

Since graduating I've completed an internship at RSPB Pulborough Brooks and worked as a reserve manager at Kingley Vale. But now I'm back where it all started, with the central team of the National Park Authority.

What does your average day look like?

As an assistant ranger no two days are ever the same, and that's what I love about the job. In just a single week, I might be putting out mink rafts, conducting bird surveys at dawn, or teaming up with volunteers to clear balsam.

What's the best part of the job?

Working with a range of volunteers, including conservation volunteers, ecological surveyors and the lumberjills (a women only coppicing group). I especially enjoy seeing how proud they are of what they've achieved and how it's helped nature.

Any challenges in the job?

There can be challenges to overcome whilst being a ranger but that's also what makes it so rewarding.

What's the biggest thing you've learned since becoming a ranger?

You never stop learning. Rangers have such a wide range of work we could never be experts in everything, but we enjoy increasing knowledge about the natural world every day.



With some of the best views of the South Downs and wider Sussex, **Chantry Farm** has a history stretching back at least 1,000 years as a working farm.

Situated just a few miles from Brighton and covering 54 acres of Wolstonbury Hill, the farm includes the Wolstonbury Dreaming eco-campsite.

This is a location where nature, history and people converge to create something timelessly special.

The site includes precious chalk grassland – often called Europe's rainforest in miniature – where a colourful carpet of flowers and butterflies support a variety of species such as barn owls, skylarks, and even glow worms.

Within the lumps and bumps of the rolling landscape are three Bronze Age earthworks. Our ancestors certainly knew what they were doing choosing a spot with such commanding views!

The **campsite**, which opened in 2012, welcomes families, groups of friends and Duke of Edinburgh groups, as well as walkers on the South Downs Way.

The accommodation includes five own-tent pitches, a Shepherd's Hut and a wonderful new Skyline Cabin, situated in a leafy orchard with views towards Brighton and the sea.



Beki Adam, from the farm, said:

"Preservation of this precious chalk grassland with its outrageously abundant summer meadow flowers is a priority for us. We welcome guests who share that appreciation!"

We've teamed up with Chantry Farm to offer a one or two night stay in the Skyline Cabin for up to three people (date by arrangement as a prize)

People signing up to the newsletter during July will be automatically entered into the draw to win the cabin stay. Those who are already signed up can email "Chantry Farm" to newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk before midnight on 31 July.

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

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/



- The UK's biggest outdoor cinema tour is returning to **Stansted Park** from 11 to 13 July! Set within the grounds of Stansted House, screenings will take place in front of the historic mansion. Pack a picnic and get ready for an experience like no other. Screenings include The Greatest Showman (sing-a-long), Queen Spectacular, and Notting Hill.
- Join Rural Strides for a friendly and relaxed **Rainbow Ramble** designed to bring together LGBTQ+ people and allies in the heart of the South Downs on 12 July.
- Head to Charleston for the **Festival of the Garden** from 17 to 20 July. The event invites you to explore the garden as a radical, resilient and restorative space. With ticketed events across outdoor and indoor stages, there will also be a free fringe programme of demos and 'how-to' sessions, plant and makers markets, a book pop-up shop, the walled garden in full bloom and lots of cool shady spaces to relax and enjoy a picnic.
- Amberley Museum is thrilled to announce the return of its much-loved **Rail Gala Weekend**, taking place on 19 and 20 July. This annual summer celebration of railway heritage is set to be bigger and better than ever, featuring a full weekend of steam, diesel, and industrial railway action that promises to delight railway enthusiasts of all ages.
- The veritable kaleidoscope that is this summer's **Petworth Festival** is back from 17 July with 40 events to enjoy. Among the highlights will be a family theatre performance of Wizard of Oz, Motown Live, dazzling violinist Jennifer Pike, and pianist Nicholas McCarthy.
- Coming up in August, Folksy Theatre will be returning to Petersfield Museum and Art Gallery for two open-air theatrical performances: **Twelfth Night** on 12 August and **Robin Hood** on 13 August.

Pic credits

P1 Tinwood Estate and Roebuck Estates; P4 Right Daniel Greenwood; P7 left Andy Reeves; P7 Right Beki Adam.