



WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **Access for all** Find out about a new fleet of off-road mobility scooters.
- **Funding lifeline** Learn more about a one-off funding boost for the National Park.
- **Amazing tree sculpture** Discover the fascinating story of two of the oldest elms in the world.
- **ReNature in action** Find out about a field that's being transformed into a wildlife haven.
- **WIN A SEASON TICKET!** Win passes to a stunning Elizabethan house and gardens.

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

Wheely good news as new service is launched

A brand new fleet of off-road mobility scooters is being unveiled at popular sites in the South Downs this spring.

The four-wheeled scooters, which will be available to hire, can cover all types of terrain and will help people with restricted mobility to make the most of the beautiful landscape and views.

To coincide with Disabled Access Day on 16 March, two mobility scooters are being unveiled at Queen Elizabeth Country Park this Wednesday.

Hogmoor Inclosure, Bordon, will also have a scooter available for hire, allowing people to explore the heathland.

And next month two bookable mobility scooters will be available to the public at Seven Sisters Country Park. Inclusive bicycles and a wheelchair trike are also being offered at Cuckmere Cycles, as well as new paddleboard equipment at Buzz Active to help people with additional needs get out on the water.

From April a scooter will also be available at Cadence Cycle Cafe in Cocking, allowing people with limited mobility to access the South Downs Way.

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



Allison Thorpe, who leads access and recreation at the South Downs National Park Authority, said: "With spring on the way, it's wonderful to be unveiling these off-road mobility scooters and other equipment to help people enjoy the South Downs.

"National Parks are for everyone and we're committed to giving everybody the opportunity to get out and enjoy the great outdoors.

Along with our Miles Without Stiles routes, we've really been able to increase our offering to people with mobility challenges and other needs and will continue working hard to create more access opportunities."

Members of Hampshire RoamAbility will be trying out the scooters at Queen Elizabeth Country Park on Wednesday.

Di Pettet, from Hampshire RoamAbility, said: "It's wonderful that these mobility scooters will now be

One-off funding boost is welcomed by Authority



A one-off payment to support rising costs for National Parks has been announced.

Trevor Beattie, Chief Executive of the National Park Authority, welcomed this month's announcement by the Secretary of State for Defra, Thérèse Coffey, that the South Downs is one of 10 National Parks in England that will receive a one-off payment of £440,000 to support rising costs.

Trevor said: "The Secretary of State is right to say that 'Our National Parks are the jewel in our cherished landscapes.

"This one-off funding boost has come at a time when funding has fallen by 40% in real terms over the last decade and, despite our best efforts, we have had to cut both staff and our delivery on the ground.

"At a cost of just 80 pence per person per year, England's National Parks offer tremendous value for money and are fundamental to delivering key government objectives around nature, climate, people and places, including net zero, 30% by 30, increased access for all to nature, and supporting the physical and mental health of the nation."

The South Downs National Park is the third biggest in England, has the largest population and is among the top 20 planning authorities in the UK by both geography and volume of applications

Trevor added: "We hope that this announcement is the first step in responding to our calls for the powers and long-term, committed funding that our landscapes deserve."



available for hire, enabling disabled people to get out in the countryside and enjoy this lovely country park with their families and friends."

Russell Oppenheimer, Executive Member for Countryside and Regulator Services at Hampshire County Council, which manages Queen Elizabeth Country Park, said: "We want everyone to enjoy the splendour of Queen Elizabeth Country Park and so the arrival of two off-road mobility scooters is fantastic news.

"For the first time individuals using these specialist scooters will be able to access three tracker-friendly trails that wind through woodland and downland.

"The County Council also has plans to install later this year a Changing Places toilet alongside accessible changing facilities and a shower which we hope will help even more visitors enjoy the day to day activities that many of us take for granted."

For more ideas on exploring the great outdoors, visit www.southdowns.gov.uk/get-active/

The vehicles are specially designed, all-terrain mobility scooters that can be used by those who have difficulty walking because of a mobility impairment to explore three of the County Park's trails.

Contact Queen Elizabeth Country Park visitor centre to book on 02392 595040 or email qecp.enquiries@hants.gov.uk



Community effort turns tragic tree into sculpture



An artist's impression of the Gilded Elm

One of the oldest English Elm trees in the world that was destined for the incinerator is being lovingly transformed into an amazing work of art.

The beautiful gilded tree sculpture will be unveiled in Preston Park, Brighton, this spring and reunited with its surviving "twin" elm.

The pair, known locally as the Preston Twins, stood side-by-side at the city park for over 400 years after being planted in 1613 during the reign of King James 1.

Fast forward to 2019 and one of the huge trees succumbed to Elm Disease – a blight that has decimated the elm population over the past 40 years, including in its strongholds of Brighton & Hove, home to the National Elm Collection, and the neighbouring South Downs.

Like many elms, the diseased tree was destined for incineration, but a big community effort has now turned tragedy into thought-provoking art.

Working with a range of organisations, groups and businesses, artist Elpida Hadzi-Vasileva has spent the past two years working on a plan to preserve the tree.

Elpida proposed turning the felled tree into a memorial, preserving what remained and adding a gilded interior surface to symbolise how much local people value the tree.



Elpida has donated much of her time pro bono for the creative work because she believes so passionately in the project.

Elpida said: "This new preserved Gilded Elm provides a major new focal point for the many people who visit the park, throughout the year, as well

as at signature events such as Brighton Festival, the Fireworks display, Pride, Comedy Garden and the Brighton Marathon.

"The final work will keep the shape, form and size of the elm with a new interior to create a jewel for Preston Park, transforming the tree into a celebration of the Preston Twins history and honouring their cultural significance. The tree may be lost, but it needs to live in our memory, knowledge, and experience. This project is a final opportunity to hold and celebrate this disappearing past."

When Elpida began to work on the project, it became clear the tree required considerable treatments to preserve it. As well as rigorous conservation treatments, with materials generously provided by Brewers Decorator Centres, the tree required structural interventions to maintain its shape and ensure its safety.

The work, to date, has been funded by Brighton & Hove City Council, Arts Council England, South Downs National Park Authority, and a wide range of local business, individuals and charity supporters including Brewers Decorator Centres, Repair Care, Amazon Access Solutions, Pride Social Impact Fund, and Connick Tree Care.

Councillor Elaine Hills, co-chair of Brighton & Hove City Council's Environment committee said: "Losing one of our precious Preston Elms was a huge blow for the city and marked the end of an era for Preston Park. So, I am thrilled that, through working with our partners at the Arts Council and South Downs National Park Authority, it will return home and live on in such a unique and creative way. I can't wait to welcome its arrival to Preston Park next month."

Claire Kerr, Countryside & Policy Manager for the Eastern Downs of the National Park, added: "This beautiful work of art has turned a negative into a positive and highlights the devastating impacts of pest and diseases like Dutch Elm Disease on our landscape and in our local parks. This iconic elm has been saved using art as a way to preserve its essence and it underlines just how important trees are to communities, both human and wildlife."



Later in the year, the South Downs National Park will be donating two disease-resistant elms to Preston Park for future generations to enjoy. This is part of the Trees for the Downs initiative which aims to replace trees lost due to pests and diseases.

If you would like to donate to the Gilded Elm project, please visit: www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/elpida-hadzi-vasileva-brighton-gilded-tree

Talented young photographers



A beautiful image of a little egret ruffling its feathers and a compelling shot showcasing the geology of the South Downs are the winners of the National Park's youth photo competition.

Sixteen-year-old Billy Evans-Freke, who attends BHASVIC in Brighton and lives near Ringmer, captured the wonderful shot "Golden Egret" as the sun broke through the clouds at Cuckmere Haven.

The theme of the 2022/2023 competition was "Near and Far" and judges were looking for amazing images that capture the National Park in intricate detail, as well as those sweeping shots of the landscape.

Billy, who wins a Forest Segway experience at Go Ape, said: "Oh wow I can't believe it! This is my first competition win so it really means a lot!"

In the 11 to 17 category, 13-year-old Felix Walker-Nix, submitted two photographs that were highly commended, including an image of a hare at Chilcomb and an amazing picture of a pair of herons by the River Itchen in Winchester.



Winning the 10 years and under category is nine-year-old Dylan Coakes with some interesting macrophotography showcasing the chalk that lies beneath our feet. The chalk of the South Downs was formed by marine deposits laid down when this part of



Britain was covered by warm, tropical seas between 65 and 100 million years ago, during the Cretaceous period.

Dylan, who lives in Lancing and attends Lancing College Prep, said: "I didn't think I would win, I'm really excited! I love taking photographs and I love nature too."

Dylan has won a den-building kit.

Stunning sunrise is a winner!



A stunning sunrise over the South Downs has won the National Park's People's Choice vote for best photograph.

"Golden Sunrise" showed a misty morning at Bury Hill, West Sussex, and was the clear favourite in the public poll, which over 1,600 people took part in. Twenty five shortlisted images from the National Park's 2022 photo competition were pitted against each other in the vote.

Picking up the £75 prize is Kasia Kedziora, who is celebrating a double victory after also winning the People's Choice last year.

Kasia only took up photography during the pandemic and describes the South Downs National Park as her 'medicine'.

Kasia, who works in quality assurance and lives in Storrington, said: "I'm surprised and delighted to win as there were a few really good images.

"I remember that Sunday when I wondered if I should go out or not as I needed to get up at 4am to go for sunrise at 5am and it was tempting to stay in bed! When I arrived the sunrise was just stunning and I captured this special photo.

"I love everything about the South Downs.

"It's nice and quiet and the sunrises and sunsets are beautiful.

"It's my favourite place to go and I call it my medicine. You can just switch off and forget about everything.

"In Poland, where I'm from originally, it's quite flat and the nearest hills are as far as going to Scotland here.

The South Downs National Park feels like my back garden and we're so lucky to have it.

With my love of photography, the South Downs is a great place to get inspired and take a great shot without going far away."

The National Park's 2023 photo competition will launch later this spring with a new theme.

Secrets of the Heath is back!

COMPETITION! Win a season pass to historic venue



Parham is one of the country's finest Elizabethan Houses and its timeless beauty has changed very little over the centuries.

Within the House there is a remarkable collection of pictures, furniture, and early needlework. Surrounding the House are seven acres of Pleasure Grounds, which incorporate a lake, many specimen trees, and a brick and turf maze.

Head to the Pleasure Grounds and you'll find a beautiful 18th century Walled Garden, which itself contains a vegetable garden, Glass House, orchard, and a Wendy House built in the 1920s.

The House and Gardens, located at Storrington, West Sussex, open for the 2023 season this month on Easter Sunday, 9 April, with the season ending on 8 October.

The South Downs National Park has partnered with **Parham House** to offer two Adult Season Tickets, worth £55, which will enable the competition winners to visit the House and Gardens and enjoy the many activities and events taking place this year.

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

Those who are already signed up can email "pear enclosure" to newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk before midnight on 31 March.

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

Please note there will be a single winner receiving the two season passes.



The popular Secrets of the Heath event returns for the Easter holidays, celebrating our local heathland's vibrant history and wildlife with a packed programme of events.

The free event takes place at Hogmoor Inclosure, Whitehill & Bordon, on Saturday 15 April from 10am to 3pm. The popular event had been due to take place last September but was postponed due to the death of Queen Elizabeth II.

From a Saxon camp, Roman chariot rides, to close encounters with reptiles, there will be activities to keep the whole family entertained.

As well as re-enactments and immersive storytelling sessions, visitors can bring their dog and have a go at the Countryside Dog Agility challenge to be in with a chance of winning a luxury doggy treat hamper.

There will also be bookable experiences, including discovering the magic of the dawn chorus and a guided walk to find out more about the brilliant bird species that call heaths home.

Olivia French, Activities and Engagement Officer for Heathlands Reunited, said: "We hope this will be a lovely day out for all the family and inspire people of all ages to take an interest in their local heathland habitat. These beautiful lowland heaths are actually as rare as the rainforest, only being found in parts of the UK and Scandinavia, and we want to encourage the community to look after them for future generations to enjoy.



"Without active management, these very special sites would disappear and species such as the sand lizard and nightjar would be lost."

As part of the run up to the event, an exciting art competition is open to children aged between five and 11 years old with the chance to win some fantastic prizes. For more information [click here](#) Prebooking is necessary for the guided walks.

For more information please contact heathlands@southdowns.gov.uk

MP marks 50th anniversary



Andrew Griffith MP joined Andy Gattiker from the National Park Authority to install a commemorative waymarker at the Amberley point of the South Downs Way, marking 50 years of the much-loved National Trail.

The 100-mile route runs along the chalk ridge of the South Downs and passes through 66 parishes. The Amberley fingerpost was one of the last parish posts to be decorated with the 50th anniversary plaque and marks the end of the project.

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

Amberley is one of the few points where walkers can access the trail by train (Amberley station, Arun Valley Line), making it an important gateway to the South Downs National Park.

Andy Gattiker, National Trails & Rights of Way Lead, said:

"We couldn't maintain the route without the help of dedicated volunteers, who get involved in surveying, practical work, helping at public events and administration, so a big thank you to them.

"We thought it would be a nice gesture for each of the parishes along the route to get a beautiful waymarker that can be attached to a fingerpost to celebrate 50 years."

Andrew Griffith said: "It was a privilege to be invited to hang the final plaque in this commemorative series, and at such a beautiful spot.



"The views from Amberley on the South Downs Way are majestic. We should all be incredibly proud to have such a wonderful and free amenity right on our doorsteps."

Renaturing of fields begins



Work is well underway to "renature" a popular site and ensure it becomes a thriving environment for wildlife and visitors alike.

Cissbury Fields, located at the foot of Cissbury Ring, were previously farmed by a tenant, but were taken back under the control of the Worthing Borough Council in 2021 as part of its pledge to support biodiversity and help tackle climate change.

The council has been working closely with the National Park Authority, National Trust, nature groups, residents and dog walkers to help create a new future for the 40-hectare fields that prioritises biodiversity.

The aim is to turn the field into a mosaic of wildlife-rich habitats, including chalk grassland, hedge and scrub.

One of the bigger changes to the management of the site will be the re-introduction of livestock, hopefully next year. The livestock will act as conservation grazers, increasing the diversity of flowers and plants and encouraging more pollinators to visit the site.

Community involvement is also at the forefront of the plans, as well as creating dedicated walking paths, entry points and an on-site car park.

Craig Daters, Lead Ranger for the Central Downs, said: "It's been very exciting to work with partners on this flagship renaturing project – part of the National Park's long-term commitment to creating new habitat for wildlife to flourish. Through the South Downs Trust, there have also been successful funding bids via Trees for the Downs and Bee Lines to plant new trees and wildflowers.

"This is just the start and I'm looking forward to seeing how this special site progresses."

Cllr Vicki Wells, Worthing's Cabinet Member for the Environment, said: "Since Neolithic times, the whole Cissbury area has supported people and nature. By creating a plan that balances restoration and 21st century engagement of the fields, we can all support this fantastic and much-loved site at a time of biodiversity crisis."

A working plan for the site can be seen [here](#). Find out more and donate to the ReNature campaign at www.southdowns.gov.uk/renature/

Two inspiring women who connect people to wildlife, landscape and heritage



Soraya Abdel-Hadi is an award-winning writer, artist, sustainability professional and founder of All The Elements – a non-profit network for those creating change on diversity in the UK outdoors. As the National Park marks International Women’s Day, Soraya gives her take on why nature is important.

I was asked recently why the outdoors and nature was important to me, and I was floored.

This is because to me it’s a nonsensical question – it’s not important, it’s a part of us as humans and we are a part of it. The two things cannot be separated out. It’s vital.

Nature provides us with all the things we need to survive – the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat... and more. Joy, spaciousness, physical health, mental health, that feeling of being a very small part of a very big system that’s been around for far longer than us and will continue long after we are gone – and from that, perspective, something which can completely change the way we live our lives.

It’s also where I’ve consistently found ‘my people’ - horse riders and climbers, mountain people and sea souls.

It’s not just on International Women’s Day that I realise that the women I know through nature and the outdoors are fierce.

They are changing the world and they are taking everyone along with them, because, like nature, they are collaborative, adaptive and uncompromising.

They build others up and tear down barriers to progress. In the face of our current climate, economic



SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

and social crises, they look to nature for recovery and for solutions.

They give me hope for what is coming next and what we can all build together.



Thérèse Kearns is the Experimental Archaeologist at Butser Ancient Farm in Hampshire. The site features archaeological reconstructions of ancient buildings from the Stone Age, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman Britain and the Anglo-Saxon period.

I grew up in rural Ireland, where my love of the outdoors was instilled from an early age.

My husband introduced me to the South Downs on one of our first dates, and I was blown away by the beauty and majesty of the landscape.

Since then, the Downs have held a very special place in my heart and we have explored much of the Downs together.

I’m happiest heading off on a long walk with packed lunch in my rucksack – I could want for nothing more.



Kingley Vale remains one of my favourite places, and others include Harting Down and the steep path from Buriton through Coulter’s Dean, home to

the most beautiful, unique collection of wildflowers.

Each season presents something new and these places never fail to enchant.

I feel fortunate to work in the South Downs National Park since I joined the team at Butser Ancient Farm as Experimental Archaeologist in 2021.

Not only do I get to do a job I love in an extraordinary setting, but I also get to work with an incredible team of people.

On this International Women’s Day, I will be celebrating all of the inspirational women of Butser Ancient Farm.

Their passion, knowledge, generosity and great humour make it a special place, and I feel honoured to work with them every day.

To the remarkable women of Butser – I salute you!

Celebrating World Water Day



Did you know that the groundwater percolating through the chalk rock of the South Downs supplies drinking water to over 2m people across the south coast?

A key section is the Brighton Chalk Aquifer that provides water for over 400,000 homes. The Aquifer Partnership was formed in 2016 with a mission to tackle pollution and raise awareness about how to protect our precious groundwater.

To mark World Water Day in March, Katherine McKee, TAP's engagement officer, shares five amazing facts about TAP:

1. We're working to engage the next generation. TAP is working with schools to create rain gardens, promoting more sustainable ways of managing water in our environment, while engaging pupils in learning about water.

The rain gardens not only help to keep the aquifer healthy but also provide fun and educational play areas for students. We know the importance of



having alternative educational settings as no two students are alike. These rain gardens transformed uninspiring areas into lush and playful spaces that spark curiosity and support water health. They give students a reason to love going outside in any weather. We've created rain gardens in three primary schools: Moulsecomb, Wallands, and Carden

2. Art is a powerful tool for conservation. TAP recognises that not everyone responds to traditional conservation methods. So, we have partnered with local artists Sprite and Snub to create a mural in an underpass that showcases the impact of urban pollutants on the aquifer, what an aquifer is, and lastly how we can help to support this vital resource. The mural is created from student artwork and will provide people with a vibrant environment as they emerge to Wild Park. The use of art not only makes conservation more accessible and approachable but also engages the community - we

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

hosted a community painting day, well attended by local residents and schoolchildren.

We've also been working with artist Laura Cook on "What is an aquifer?", a short stop motion watercolor film.



3. TAP is a partnership between four organisations

TAP is a collaboration between the South Downs National Park Authority, Brighton & Hove City Council, the Environment Agency and Southern Water. By working together, TAP is able to implement a range of projects across urban and rural communities. The partnership provides opportunities to connect with farmers and landowners to understand their concerns and promote best practices. TAP believes that by bringing together different stakeholders, we can achieve more than one organisation can achieve alone. Since working together TAP has connected leaders working together to make SuDS projects across Brighton, Hove, and Lewes a reality. We've still got a long way to go to compete with SuDS pioneers like the London Borough of Enfield, but working together is our way forward.

4. We're not just focused on our local community. We want to help support groundwater everywhere, so we've been publishing case studies and working on research projects that can benefit others around the globe. Our work with masters students has a broad range from examining the effects of cover crops on soil nitrate, to our current project studying how road runoff into a local park is impacting the groundwater quality in that area. This research in collaboration with The Living Coast and University of Brighton, even received funding from UNESCO.

5. Rain Gardens everywhere! Since starting TAP we knew we had to work on projects both big and small. This is why we began the rain garden campaign, as a way to get anyone and everyone involved. Rain gardens are vital in urban areas, especially those like Brighton and Hove which are so prone to flooding. Rain gardens are a nature based solution to rainwater management. They allow rain water to slow down and soak up rather than rushing into drains all at once and overwhelming our systems. We've online resources explaining the process step by step as well as local examples such as the rain planter at The Bevy pub!



To find out more about TAP and protecting the Brighton Chalk Aquifer, visit <https://wearetap.org.uk/>

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/



- Try out our **[WALK OF THE MONTH](#)** - discovering the beauty of Bramber and the River Adur's "Miles Without Stiles" route.
- Calling fans of knitwear! The first-ever exhibition of colourful novelty knitwear as designed and worn by Gyles Brandreth will be taking place at **[Petersfield Museum and Art Gallery](#)** from 21 March. From a flying pig, corgi, and hearts to bow ties, a piano keyboard and penguins, the exhibition celebrates these distinctive joyous jumpers. Designed over 40 years ago, they continue to bring fun to a new audience today.
- Fancy something different? Join David Tipper, of Earth Resonance, at **[Butser Ancient Farm](#)** on 25 March for a "sound bath" connecting with Earth energies through frame drumming and chant.
- Treat your loved ones with an extra special lunch this Mother's Day at **[Gilbert White's House & Gardens](#)**.
- Head to the The Towner Gallery in Eastbourne for its **[Spring Fair](#)** on 18 and 19 March. Showcasing the best of independent making from jewellery, leatherwork, textiles and printmaking to aroma and skincare as well as beautiful local produce (think everything you might need for a picnic!), there will be treats to suit every budget. Towner will also be partnering with **[Eastbourne Food Partnership](#)**, who'll be hosting community growing projects Rooted and Gather. Their 'Seedy Stall' will be providing all the tips and tricks you need to get growing this Spring, as well as the opportunity to share and collect seeds. You can even pledge to 'grow a row' for local community projects!

Pic credits

P3 Helen Waters and Valerie Mabbott; P5 right Anne Purkiss; P9 Eva Bronzini