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South Downs News

WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **The power of dance** Discover how young people are connecting with this cherished landscape.
- **Response to national plan** Find out our thoughts on the new Environmental Improvement Plan.
- **Dazzling dark skies and dogs** Discover the winners of two popular photo competitions.
- **WIN A FAMILY TICKET!** Win a day pass to a splendid historic house and museum.

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Nature dance connects people to National Park

An inspiring dance performance at stunning locations across the South Down is bringing people closer to nature through the power of movement.

"Echoes Within the Earth" follows two lost adventurers as they embark on a journey through the sights and sounds of nature.

Choreographed by the talented Chris Pavia, who became the first choreographer with Down's Syndrome to make a dance piece for national touring, the work is inspired by Chris' childhood experiences of woodland in the South Downs.

Chris worked with contemporary dancers Jonathan Mewett and Abbie Thompson, who performed a breathtaking duet to a live audience at Petworth Park, Seven Sisters Country Park and Gilbert White's House and Gardens.

The initiative included a series of immersive workshops for young people, including pupils from Treloar School in Alton and children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

The live dances have now culminated in a beautiful short film, released today (1 Feb), that captures the dances and the profound impact they had on people.



The initiative has been spearheaded by Farnham-based Stoppag Dance Company, where Chris joined as a dancer 25 years ago and is now resident choreographer. The company has become



a global leader in creating dance opportunities at all levels for people with disabilities or neurodiversity.

Reflecting on the project, Chris, who lives in Guildford and is a MENCAP ambassador, said: "The National Park's forests were inspirational to the choreography – the journeys through the trees felt like a new world to discover for me.

"The sounds of the trees were important – and at times, you think you are lonely but then you begin to play with the shadows, and you are drawn into and supported by nature."

And Chris added: "I would like the audience to feel intrigued by the mystery of the trees and the surprise of the journey."

Dancer Jonathan Mewett said: "It was a very collaborative process from day one and it was really special working with Chris.

It was interesting to see his process because he'd come in with an improvisation that he had filmed and from that we'd translate it on to our bodies.

"Each place we went to in the National Park was really welcoming. I think dancing outdoors just reminded me