

SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

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NATIONAL PARK

WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **Royal seal of approval** This month find out about The King's visit to the National Park and the unveiling of a new nature haven and coastal path.
- **Hope and joy** Learn about how nature has bounced back after a national tragedy.
- **Secret of the sword** Find out about an incredible Anglo-Saxon artefact that's gone on display.
- **WIN a voucher!** Enter our competition for the chance to win a discount at One Garden Brighton.

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

“Tree of Hope” is planted

A “Tree of Hope” grown from the iconic Sycamore Gap tree on Hadrian’s Wall has been planted in the National Park.

Community leaders gathered at a beautiful spot next to Swanbourne Lake, Arundel, to plant the tree.

The tree was grown with seeds taken from the original Sycamore Gap tree that was illegally felled in Northumberland National Park in 2023. Since then, new shoots have emerged and 49 saplings – one for each foot of the tree’s height – have been nurtured over the past two years by the National Trust’s Plant Conservation Centre.

Each of the UK’s 15 National Parks has been gifted a “tree of hope” as symbols of nature recovery and shared stewardship for the landscape. The tree-planting ceremony coincides with the 16th anniversary of the creation of the South Downs National on 31 March.

The Sycamore Gap tree, which stood for more than 150 years, captured the hearts of the nation and its legacy will now grow in every National Park.



The tree in the South Downs was planted with kind permission of His Grace, the Duke of Norfolk.

His Grace said: “We are delighted to receive this historic sycamore tree and plant it by Swanbourne Lake where we hope it will be visited and



enjoyed by many people for years to come.”

Vanessa Rowlands, Chair of the South Downs National Park Authority, said: “It’s incredible to think that this beautiful tree has been grown from the Sycamore Gap tree and it just shows how nature can bounce back and recover.

“National Parks are about bringing people together and finding a connection with nature, so we are really pleased to plant this tree as we celebrate the birthday of the South Downs National Park.

“I hope this tree touches as many lives as the original Sycamore Gap tree did and spreads positivity, hope and joy.”

The Mayor of Arundel, Cllr Carolyn Kenney, said: “We are honoured that this Tree of Hope, with its rich cultural heritage, has been planted in Arundel at the gateway to the glorious landscape of the South Downs National Park.”

Royal approval as new nature reserve is created



His Majesty The King alongside Tony Juniper, from Natural England, and Emma Reynolds MP, Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

A new National Nature Reserve spanning a vast area of East Sussex has been announced to help protect vital water resources in the unique chalk landscape.

The **Seven Sisters National Nature Reserve (SSNRR)** is the **UK's first groundwater-inspired reserve** of its kind and seeks to protect our drinking water, which filters through the chalk landscape of the South Downs. The National Nature Reserve, which covers 1,500 hectares, includes precious wildlife habitats, including chalk grassland, rare chalk heath, woodland, saltmarsh, scrubland, flood plains, an estuary and underwater chalk reefs.

The aim of the new designation is to safeguard precious groundwater that provides drinking water to around half a million people and improve biodiversity, as well as connect local communities, businesses and visitors with the area's remarkable, water-rich wildlife haven.

The Seven Sisters National Nature Reserve stretches from Seaford to the chalk downland around busy urban areas in Eastbourne and includes the Seven Sisters cliffs, Cuckmere Valley and Lullington Heath.



The designation is part of the **King's Series of National Nature Reserves**, creating a lasting legacy for future generations to enjoy, appreciate and care for the natural world. As well as visiting the reserve, The King Charles III England Coast Path was also officially launched by His Majesty the King.

His Majesty walked a 2-kilometre stretch of the coast path, taking in the spectacular views of the Seven Sisters and enjoying the sight of the majestic chalky cliff. The Seven Sisters route forms part of King Charles III England Coast Path, which is now the longest managed coastal walking

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route in the world, to be enjoyed both by visitors and local communities.

The chalk geology of this coastal corner of Sussex is extraordinary. The chalk rock is the remains of tiny sea creatures that lived in an ancient sea between 100 and 66 million years ago, when T.rex and Velociraptor still roamed the Earth. Compacted by burial and uplifted tectonic forces over millennia, it now forms a huge chalk dome that contains one of Britain's largest aquifers – an unseen, finite water resource that needs protecting. The porous nature of the chalk means it acts as an enormous sponge, soaking up thousands of litres of water.

On top of the ground is a vast network of chalk streams, rivers, estuaries, wetlands, ponds and coastal waters - all supporting hundreds of species of flora and fauna, including wading birds such as dunlin and redshank, the short-snouted seahorse, the rare yellow-horned poppy and the mysterious yellow brain fungus.

A celebration event took place at Longbridge Regenerative, a landholding next to Lullington Heath at the heart of the National Nature Reserve, bringing together the eight partners and their shared vision for the future.

Siôn McGeever, Chief Executive of the National Park Authority, said: "It's so exciting to be part of this new partnership to help protect and enhance this truly unique area of the South Downs National Park.

"Chalk and water are a central part of the South Downs and they are vital for both nature and people. We've just unveiled our Partnership Management Plan for the next five years and water is quite rightly one of our priorities.



"I'm looking forward to seeing what we can achieve together to create a lasting legacy of cleaner water, more biodiversity, better soils and local communities inspired and empowered to care for this incredible landscape."

The partners in the project are Eastbourne Borough Council, Forestry England, National Trust, Natural England, Seaford Town Council, South Downs National Park Authority, South East Water and Sussex Wildlife Trust.

The creation of the Seven Sisters National Nature Reserve will allow much greater collaboration between the organisations, helping to connect the matrix of habitats in the area through better landscape management. A key goal of the partnership is to work closely with landowners and farmers to grow the National Nature Reserve to include more privately-owned land. The work will include regenerative, nature-friendly farming to improve the soils, improving the quality of waterways and conservation grazing by sheep, ponies or cows to help the chalk grassland flourish.

Sword relic goes on display



A beautiful fitting from a rare Anglo-Saxon sword discovered in the South Downs has gone on display for the first time.

The Stopham Mount, thought to be between 1,300 and 1,400 years old, has gone on display at The Novium Museum in Chichester following a successful crowdfunding appeal.

Discovered in 2022 near Stopham, the mount dates to around AD 600-700. While similar mounts have been found in other archaeological excavations – including the Staffordshire Hoard and the Sutton Hoo burial – it's only the second object of its kind found in West Sussex.

Measuring just over 16mm in height, it's believed it would have once adorned the scabbard of a sword of a high-status warrior. Decorated with intricate gold settings and garnets, it would have been a statement of power, wealth and status.

The mount was acquired by the museum after a successful crowdfunding appeal that raised £9,000.

Since its acquisition, The Novium has been preparing the mount for display, including conservation work and purchasing a new display case supported by a grant from Arts Council England, Art Fund and Museum Development South East.

Anooshka Rawden, Cultural Heritage Lead for the National Park, explained: "The South Downs is rich in the story of Saxon settlement.

"A landscape that looked different from today with its extensive salt marshes and seasonally flooded islands, inlets and river valley estates - kingdoms emerged, including Sussex and Wessex, and we can see the stories of Saxon life and death at sites such as Apple Down, which revealed an Anglo-Saxon cemetery from the 6th century, and St. Hubert's in Idsworth, with its origins in the 11th century, among many others.

"But with the Stopham Mount we benefit from seeing the colour, splendour and craftsmanship of Saxon England. Beyond being a symbol of power and status, survivals like this can also tell us about materials, trade and visual culture – an amazing artefact to join The Novium Museum's significant archaeological collections from the Chichester District."

A gem of a discovery!



An extraordinary fungal discovery has been made in the South Downs National Park.

Amateur fungi enthusiast Liz Frost was stunned after spotting a tiny, tongue-shaped fungus that turned out to be the first-ever UK sighting of *Microglossum cyanobasis*, the Blue-Based Earthtongue, and only the second ever recorded in Europe.

The species was spotted at Kingley Vale National Nature Reserve.

Microglossum cyanobasis belongs to a fascinating group of fungi commonly called Earthtongues. These little organisms look just like their name suggests - small tongues emerging from the earth.

The really unusual aspect of this species is base of the stem, which has a distinctive cyan-bluish tinge. This is where its name comes from - 'cyanobasis' meaning blue base.

Liz said: "I stumbled upon something extraordinary - a tiny, tongue-shaped fungus poking up through the moss and leaf litter.

"On my first visit, I found six individuals growing closely together amongst yews, oaks and mossy soil.

"Excitement got the better of me and I returned the very next day, discovering another twelve nearby. They're incredibly easy to miss – small and well camouflaged amongst the woodland floor – which might explain why they've gone unnoticed until now."

Rachel Guy, Reserve Manager, added: "It was a great day when I heard from Liz about her discovery.

"As an indicator of high-quality habitats, this find highlights the value of National Nature Reserves and the hard work by everyone to look after these special places for nature."

Kingley Vale is a very sensitive site in the National Park. Please help care for this special place by leaving no trace and respecting the precious wildlife there.

Climate network reaches 100



Greening Arundel are part of the network

A network all about tackling climate change in South Downs communities has just welcomed its 100th member.

Since launching in late 2024, the South Downs Climate Action Network has grown from strength to strength.

Hosted on Knowledge Hub, it allows local communities to share useful tips and stories around climate action.

Sara Osman, Climate Change Officer for the National Park, said: "It's fast becoming a fabulous resource to inspire new action by learning from others.

"You can find information on understanding climate change, how to set up a community group, how to start a repair café or a library of things, funding opportunities, plus a whole lot more!



"It's a great space to share resources and events, see climate action newsletters in one place and ask questions from the hive mind if you want to know about anything related to climate change and taking action.

"The South Downs Climate Action Network has members from community climate and environment groups, Eco Church groups and environmental organisations across the National Park and surrounding areas."

Interested in joining? Please register with Knowledge Hub <https://khub.net/>, search for "South Downs Climate Action Network" (<https://khub.net/group/sdnpa-climate-action-working-group>) and click on the request to join button. Once you have joined you will receive a weekly update email that is easy to scroll and see what topics are of interest to you.

Want to find out if there is a climate action group near to you? We also have a [Climate Action Map](#) that you can search to find out what is happening in your community. If there is a group where you live that is not on the map, they can add themselves by filling in a form on our [Climate Action Hub](#).

Path facelift at country park



Improvements have been made to a country park in Hampshire thanks to a funding scheme overseen by the National Park.

A 600m section of the South Downs Way at Queen Elizabeth Country Park has been given a makeover after Hampshire County Council was awarded £60,000.

Meanwhile, a further £70,000 was awarded to provide a Changing Places facility, as well as a shower block and changing rooms for walkers, runners and cyclists.

The funding came from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), which is administered by the National Park Authority and paid by developers as a means of supporting new infrastructure.

The improved section of the South Downs Way that has been improved leads from Halls Hill car park, near Buriton.

Nikki Allen, CIL Planning Officer for the National Park, said: "The South Downs Way was in a poor condition, very difficult to walk and hazardous to ride. Much of the top surfacing layer had been worn or washed away with large chunks of brick and rock protruding

"The project aims were to significantly improve this section of the National Trail and make it more accessible for all.

"The surfacing work has now been completed, including extensive works to manage the surface water run off on this steep path. This has made the path safe to use by walkers and cyclists and also now useable for horse riders and visitors using the Park on mobility scooters."

And Nikki added: "The Changing Places unit has broadened access for disabled visitors.

"The project has also provided improved facilities that will benefit a wider section of park visitors, especially younger people."



“The Downs are so vast we never get bored of exploring”



Nicola Robertz lives in Portsmouth and enjoys trips to the National Park with her family. Here she writes about the wonderful joys of spring and her family's discovery of a new favourite walk.

Everybody, literally everybody, I've spoken to recently has mentioned how this has felt like the longest toughest winter they can remember.

Non-stop rain soaking through jeans, blustery winds whipping hair in our faces, low grey light before dark never-ending evenings and wellies permanently caked in thick mud.

No surprise then that as soon as there is the first hint of sunshine, my family and I search for a walk in the South Downs National Park. The area is so vast that we never get bored of exploring. We decide this time to avoid all our tried and tested favourites (Kingley Vale, Old Winchester Hill and Catherington) and instead choose a new area; Dundry and Upper Swanmore Circular.

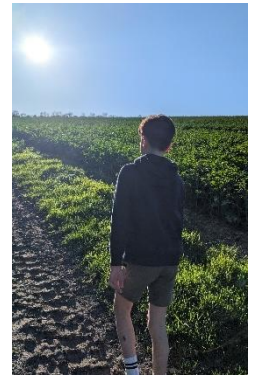


Even just stepping out of the car, the signs of Spring are immediately apparent. I relish the soft warmth on my back and the joyful sound of birdsong filling the air around us. THIS. This is what I've been waiting for and I feel my shoulders drop as I take a

deep, calm breath. Spring has always has that effect on me, an instant mood lift and renewed energy.



And I'm not the only one. The science shows that most of us benefit hugely from the increased sunlight exposure, which boosts serotonin and helps regulate our circadian rhythms. The extra time spent in nature and the extra vitamin D also help by balancing our immune systems. Plus there's that lovely association with new beginnings to inspire hopeful optimism. Throw in the pretty blossom and some cute lambs and what's not to like?!



The walk itself is lovely. We make our way through woodland, then alongside paddocks and crop fields, gently climbing (and sometimes not so gently climbing!) to a stunning view across lush green fields.

Colourful butterflies dance around our heads – too quickly for an amateur photographer like me to capture – while tiny robins sing for our attention. Not everywhere is green



yet. Spring is only just waking up after the long stretch of winter! But the little signs are there in the tiny buds peeking through the undergrowth, the sun casting shadows across the fields, and the abundance of daffodils. The changes in the landscape are clear to see. That optimism shines through.

As the afternoon winds on, I fully appreciate the soft dappled light through the trees, grateful that it's 5pm and we are still able to be out walking, dry and warm, with time and nature ahead of us.

We pass charming cottages and more horses. We spot bumblebees sipping on pollen. Four buzzards circle overhead. We hear the distinctive sound of a woodpecker. We even happen upon an alpaca being given its dinner!

Meanwhile, the gravel lane leads us back to our starting point where the sky has grown orange but the scent of spring still hangs in the cool air.



And then finally, with a fulfilled kind of tiredness, we end our day at a sweet little pub in the nearby village of Droxford - The delicious food and ale making us even more grateful to have the South Downs Park on our doorstep!

Our walk can be found **here** if you fancy trying it 😊

WHY NOT WRITE AN ARTICLE FOR US? If you love the South Downs and would like to write about a place in the National Park that you love please get in touch at newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk

Please don't risk your life...



Visitors to the spectacular heritage coast in the National Park are being urged to stay safe around the coastline's cliffs and waterways and plan ahead before their trip.

Every year, thousands of tonnes of chalk falls from the cliffs which stretch from the edge of Eastbourne, past Beachy Head, the Seven Sisters and Seaford Head.

Despite warning signs, people often stand near the edge of the fragile cliffs to take a look at the beach below or take a selfie or walk along the beach, or even have picnics, close to the base of the cliffs.

With the warmer weather attracting more visitors, we're encouraging people not to take unnecessary risks. Previous summers have also seen people crossing the River Cuckmere and the Coastguard has warned this is a dangerous threat to life due to the strength of the tide.

Claire Onslow, who manages Seven Sisters Country Park, said: "These cliffs are many millions of years old and actually made up of tiny compacted prehistoric skeletons of ancient marine life – so by their very nature they are extremely crumbly and can give way at any time.

"You can still take some amazing pictures, but just a safe distance well back from the edge. It's just not worth risking you or your family's life for. Dogs should also be kept on close leads as there have been incidents where dogs have run over the edge."

And Claire added: "Seven Sisters continues to be a very popular location for visitors from across the UK and globally. We want everyone to enjoy this haven for nature, as well as the wildlife to flourish, so please take extra care not to drop litter, bag and bin dog poo and keep dogs under close control as we have lots of ground-nesting birds and livestock in the area."

Seven Sisters gets extremely busy on warm sunny days and weekends over the spring and summer months. Parking is limited, so please do factor this in and consider visiting less busy sites in the National Park. The best way to get there is by using trains and the local bus service. For more information visit this [webpage](#).

Win discount at One Garden!



Sandwiched between rolling green downland and the bustling city of Brighton is a garden for all seasons and imaginations.

One Garden Brighton, on the historic Stanmer Estate, features stunning walled gardens that have been expertly designed by modern-day landscape architect Dominic Cole, who is renowned for his work on the Eden Project.

Restored five years ago as part of a partner-wide project that was supported by the National Park Authority, the site has become a destination in Sussex and boasts a café, market and a wide range of events and activities for all ages.

The gardens are captivating – find peace in the contemplation section or learn how to make the most out of tiny spaces in the urban garden.

Owned and managed by Plumpton College, there are a huge range of courses on offer, from floristry to medicinal plants and how to make the perfect sour dough bread.

New for 2026 is the unveiling of the Sussex Butterfly Gardens, which will officially open to the public on 23 May. It follows an ambitious restoration project that has breathed new life into the estate's historic Palm House.

"Transforming the historic Palm House into a lush, tropical sanctuary for hundreds of butterflies is a proud moment," says Matthew Simmonds, Director and Founder of Sussex Butterfly Gardens. "We are creating a fully immersive visitor attraction. It offers an interactive jungle experience for the public while providing students with hands-on experience in a truly unique environment."

We've teamed up with One Garden Brighton to offer a £25 voucher to use in the café, which offers Pharmacie coffee that's delivered on an e-bike fresh each week from their roastery in Lewes and a selection of impressive cakes from the in-house bakery.

People signing up to the newsletter during April will be automatically entered into the draw to win the family pass. Those who are already signed up can email "Nicholas Dubois" 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/



- Join the Western Sussex Rivers Trust's passionate and knowledgeable Chief Executive Aimee Felus for a deep dive into the state of our rivers and how we can take action for our riverscapes – for ourselves, the wildlife who live on them and for future generations. Find out why we need to bring the power of imagination to the realm of river restoration, and what can happen as a result! This is a time of unprecedented challenges, but also of unprecedented opportunities. **This talk on 21 April** is guaranteed to leave you feeling inspired!
- **Fittleworth House in Fittleworth** will be opening its glorious gardens every Wednesday afternoon from 22 April to 13 May. It's a tranquil, romantic 3-acre country garden with a redesigned walled kitchen garden growing fruit, vegetables, and flowers, including a large collection of dahlias. A magnificent cedar tree overlooks the wisteria-covered, Grade II listed Georgian house (not open to public).
- Calling all history buffs! **A guided walk** will be taking place on 26 April, led by James Sainsbury, Curator of Archaeology at Worthing Museum. The walk will explore the Lewes Downs with views over the beautiful Ouse Valley. The Caburn is an impressive Iron Age hillfort that has seen extensive excavations over the last 150 years. The Caburn sits on a fascinating block of downland, with numerous archaeological features still visible in the grassy landscape, including 4,000-year-old barrow cemeteries. This walk involves a long steep climb at the beginning (and a long easy descent at the end!)
- Starting at **Arundel Museum** on 2 May is a fascinating exhibition about the Women's Land Army. The exhibition will explore the practicalities of how the Land Army was organised, the key figures involved and some of the challenges that were encountered along the way.

Friends of the SOUTH DOWNS
Protecting the beauty of the Downs for over 130 years

Western Sussex Rivers Trust

A deep dive into the state of our rivers and how we can take action for our riverscapes

Reimagining Rivers with Aimee Felus
Chief Executive of the Western Sussex Rivers Trust

Tuesday 21st April at 7pm
Pulborough Village Hall

Tickets £3