

SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

HELP US TO #RENATURE
SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK

WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **75th birthday** As National Parks reach a big milestone this month, we're giving out 75 grants to schools across the region to help children create their very own wildlife havens.
- **Christmas in the great outdoors** We recommend six family-friendly walks with a splendid view.
- **Triumph for trees** Find out about our latest efforts this winter to help nature and woodlands.
- **Mistletoe and wine!** Well, perhaps not the mistletoe, but we're giving away a bottle of local fizz!

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

Celebrating 75 years of your National Parks

Seventy-five years ago National Parks were created as special places where people and nature could come together, bringing hope and joy to a nation scarred by war.

Now, 75 years on and to celebrate the anniversary on 16 December, the South Downs National Park is helping 75 schools to add beautiful wildlife havens to their school grounds.

Schools across the National Park and surrounding areas will be able to apply for grants of up to £1,000.

The "ReNature Grants" can be used for a myriad of purposes, such as planting a wildflower meadow, planting trees, digging a pond, building a bee hotel, installing bird boxes or creating an allotment. The initiative ties in with the National Park's ongoing ReNature campaign, which is fighting against biodiversity loss by creating scores of new wildlife havens across the region.



It comes after the National Park launched a new immersive film trail along the South Downs Way earlier this year to mark the 75th birthday. The "Your National Park" trail celebrates the local



heroes of the South Downs and explores their intimate connections with the amazing landscape.

Siôn McGeever, Chief Executive of the South Downs National Park Authority, said: "Seventy five years on since their creation, National Parks continue to welcome, inspire and reinvigorate people of all ages, while becoming hubs for the nation's nature and climate ambitions.

"It's wonderful to be announcing this new funding to support schools and young people as we mark this milestone for National Parks.

"Young people need access to nature more than ever before, not only because they are the future custodians of our planet, but also because outdoor learning brings so many benefits to their health and wellbeing.

"Ultimately, we want nature to be everywhere for everyone and this new scheme is another step towards that goal.



“Young people can play such an important role in helping biodiversity bounce back and I’m excited to see the new wildlife havens that are created by this inspiring initiative.”

Half of the funding is being provided by the National Park Authority and the other half by the South Downs National Park Trust, the official charity of the National Park.

Applications can be received until 1 July and are on a first-served basis.

Find out more and apply at <https://southdownstrust.org.uk/national-parks-75th-birthday-renature-fund-for-schools/>

The National Park’s ReNature initiative is looking to transform 13,000 hectares – or over 20,000 football pitches – into habitat for wildlife by 2030.

A total of 6,082 hectares – an area bigger than Worthing or Portsmouth – has now been created or improved to help nature thrive. Find out more at www.southdowns.gov.uk/renature

The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act received Royal Assent on December 16, 1949, establishing National Parks in the UK.

This visionary piece of legislation aimed to create a legacy of protecting Britain’s most precious landscapes following the horrors of the Second World War.

There was a desire to encourage the public to get out of the polluted cities and factories and spend time in the countryside to refresh body and mind.

The Act also laid the groundwork for the creation of long-distance countryside trails, now known as National Trails in England and including the 100-mile-long South Downs Way.

There are 15 National Parks in the UK and the South Downs is the youngest, having been created in 2010.



Frosty Butser Hill by Ashley Chaplin

When you wish upon a star...



‘T’was the night before Christmas and the twinkle of the endless skyscape above couldn’t be more festive!

Winter stargazing season is upon us and, provided you wrap up and take a warming drink, there are few things more uplifting on a clear night than a walk in the International Dark Sky Reserve.

There’s so much to see, explains Elinor Newman, “Queen of the Darkness” who organises the Dark Skies Festival in the National Park.

“This is a great time of year to get outdoors and enjoy the dark skies,” says Elinor.

“The moon – the next full moon (the “cold” moon) is on Sunday, 15 December, and we have a category in our astrophotography competition all about the moon!

“The crescent moon, visible just before and just after the new moon on 30 December, is also beautiful in the sky and doesn’t wash out the other celestial objects.

“We have a wonderful parade of planets visible in the skies at the moment. Venus can be seen glowing brightly in the southwest just after sunset, while Jupiter rises shortly after in the east and Saturn is visible in the south. Later on in the evening, Mars also rises in the northeast, a bright red object that reaches its brightest (known as opposition) on 16 January 2025. Mercury is also showing off in the morning skies, just before sunrise.”

And Elinor adds: “Don’t tell the summer constellations, but I think the winter constellations are some of my favourites! Orion is always a magnificent sight, with the three stars of his belt pointing down to the brightest star in the sky, Sirius. Orion also has some great nebulae to take a look at – get some binoculars and have a look at the area below the leftmost star in his belt. If it is dark and clear enough, this nebula is visible to the naked eye as a fuzzy object.”

Our ever-popular astrophotography competition is currently running, offering prizes of £100 for breathtaking images of the night sky. **The deadline for entries to the competition is midnight on Wednesday, 15 January.**

This year we have a mobile phone category, so everyone can take part, regardless of whether they have special camera equipment or not!

Click [here](#) for details of the competition. Good luck!

Favourite Christmas walks with a spectacular view!



There's something so uplifting about walking in a big wide-open space with a stunning view – and what better time to enjoy it than Christmas?

The festive season is a wonderful time to recharge the batteries and enjoy some precious downtime with family and friends. A wintry walk is also a great way to dust off those Christmas cobwebs, enjoy a blast of fresh air and get the creaking body moving after one too many mince pies and stuffing sandwiches!

With 3,600km (2,200 miles) of rights of way, the South Downs National Park is a walkers' paradise – and if it's scenic vistas you're after, you've come to the right place.

Andy Gattiker, who leads access in the National Park, said: "With its misty mornings, amazing early sunsets, and frost-covered hills, the South Downs really does turn into a winter wonderland at this time of the year.

"We've hundreds of great walks for people to enjoy, whether you're looking for a 30-minute stroll or an afternoon of rambling with the family, there's something for everyone. As one of the UK's great lowland landscapes, we're one of the most accessible National Parks where you don't need hiking boots and expensive equipment to enjoy an amazing view. Just make sure to wrap up warm at this time of the year as it can get jolly cold up on those hills! I hope people enjoy getting out and about in the National Park this festive season and do remember to 'leave no trace' and keep dogs on leads around livestock to help our farmers."

Here are Andy's six favourite festive walks with a view:

Butser Hill, near Petersfield, Hampshire

The highest point on the ancient South Downs chalk ridge, this hill is relatively small at 271m, but its views are certainly mighty. With sweeping views across the south coast and its very own "Grandfather's Bottom", the walk around the summit doesn't need to be too taxing and is perfect after those Yuletide indulgences!

Old Winchester Hill, Hampshire

As the hedgerows sparkle with festive red berries, Old Winchester Hill is a stunning spot for a stroll over the holidays.

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Splendid views across fields and out to The Solent make it a great spot to explore the ramparts of this Iron Age hillfort. A circular footpath explores Old Winchester Hill's steep slopes and woodland, or the hill fort route will take you directly to the top of the hill.

Whatever route you take, it's never too strenuous and you'll be richly rewarded with the views.

Cissbury Ring, near Worthing, West Sussex

One of the largest Hill Forts in Southern England, Cissbury Ring is undeniably one of the jewels in the crown of the South Downs National Park.



With awe-inspiring views in every direction and the feeling of being "on top of the world", Cissbury Ring captures the essence of the South Downs. With a history stretching back five millennia and wonderful views across to the Isle of Wight, there are fewer more scenic locations for a festive walk!

Blackdown, near Fernhurst, West Sussex

A rugged landscape of pine trees and heathers, Blackdown gives walkers a true sense of "wild" and is the highest point in the National Park at 280m.

The views have inspired many and none so renowned as Tennyson himself: 'You came and looked and loved the view, long known and loved by me, Green Sussex fading into blue with one grey glimpse of sea.'

As you amble down some of the ancient sunken lanes and drove ways, you can feel a sense of timelessness. Traders, shepherds and chert quarrymen have been using these tracks for thousands of years.

Seven Sisters Country Park, East Sussex



The view of the Cuckmere Valley and the Seven Sisters is perhaps one of the most picturesque in the world.

The Country Park boasts a range of walks, including a concrete path route down to the coast that is perfect for families with pushchairs and mobility scooters (which can be hired out of course!). The Bailey's Hot Chocolate being served at the visitor centre's Grab And Go makes the perfect warming treat!

Mount Caburn, near Lewes, East Sussex

Just a stone's throw from the National Park's biggest town is this 150-metre hill that offers magnificent views for miles around, including the pretty village of Glynde, the Ouse Valley and the sprawling Weald. According to local folklore, a Giant by the name of Gil is said to have walked the slopes of Mount Caburn, hurling his hammer from the summit. These days the preference upon reaching the summit is to take a nice photograph of family and friends enjoying their Christmas outing!

For more festive walking ideas in the National Park, check out our [walking hub](#) here.

Life-giving trees go into the ground this winter



More than 20,000 tree plantings and a new woodland the size of five football pitches are part of a major nature recovery drive this winter by the National Park.

Among the tree planting efforts will be over 400 new disease-resistant elms, helping to return the iconic elm to the South Downs landscape after it was decimated by disease.

Scores of trees are going into the ground at 20 new sites across Sussex and Hampshire.

The 20,294 trees being planted this winter bring the **Trees for The Downs** initiative ever closer to smashing its target of planting 100,000 trees by the middle of this decade. The total is currently almost 75,000 and the National Park hopes to reach the target as it marks its 15th birthday next year.

Some 20 sites across the length and breadth of the National Park are benefitting from tree planting thanks to Trees for the Downs, which launched five years ago and is led by the South Downs National Park Trust, the official charity for the National Park.



The tree planting is creating new habitat for wildlife, amenity value for local communities and increasing carbon storage to help mitigate climate change and improve soil quality. The trees are a mixture of disease-resistant elm trees and native

species, such as oak and black poplar, and sites include schools, farms, recreation grounds and historic parks. There are early signs that nature is bouncing back in some places, thanks to the new trees.

The planting this year has been made possible by a number of generous donations from the public and donors, including Boomtown – whose support has funded more than half of the trees with planting focused at sites

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in and around the festival. Support has also come from American Express, South East Water, Sykes Cottages, University of Sussex, and the London to Brighton EV Rally.

In addition to the 20,294, the Trust has supported the creation of 3.42 hectares of new woodland at Rough House Farm, Elsted, West Sussex. Up to 4,500 trees are also being planted over two years in the Hampshire Hangers, which run between Farnham and Petersfield, as part of landscape enhancements led by National Grid.

Nick Heasman, a Countryside and Policy Manager for the National Park, said: "Trees provide clean air for us to breathe, enrich

our soils, provide a vital habitat for wildlife and, crucially, are amazing carbon capturers.

"Trees for the Downs has

gone from strength to strength and I'm excited at the prospect of reaching 100,000 as the South Downs National Park marks its 15th anniversary and National Parks their 75-year anniversary.

"This tree planting is something we can all be proud of and none of it would have been possible without the support of local communities and businesses who have gone the extra mile to give back to nature, I'd like to say a massive 'thank you'."

The green shoots of nature recovery are emerging in some sites where trees have been planted over the past five years. A new corridor of elms on land that was previously commercially grazed near Wilmington, East Sussex, is providing refuges for wildlife as nearby ash trees succumb to disease.

Landowner Alison Cotton said: "Protecting this area has had a noticeable effect on wildlife, with large ant mounds developing in the long tussocky grass, blackthorn scrub spreading in from the boundary and oak seedlings proliferating. Badgers, small mammals and birds of prey have been seen in the area."

Elms are thriving on land at Lancing College, where trees were planted three years ago.

Jon Hutcheon, Farm Manager, said: "The results have been positive and, despite the very changeable weather patterns, the elms are flourishing."

In order to hit the 100,000 target, the South Downs National Park Trust is inviting expressions of interest for tree planting for the winter of 2025/2026. To make an application for potential tree planting next year, visit <https://southdownstrust.org.uk/trees-for-the-downs-fund/>

The deadline for applications is 31 March 2025.

To donate to Trees for the Downs visit this [webpage](#).



An early Christmas gift



The National Park has received an early Christmas present with a big funding boost from OSB Group.

The business is donating a total of £90,000 towards much-needed nature recovery in the National Park, as well as helping more children and young people have access to learning opportunities in the inspiring landscape.

Split into £30,000-a-year over the next three years, the funding will help to plant thousands of new trees, create new wildflower meadows to support pollinators and restore wetlands to help birds, mammals and insects flourish.

The donation to the South Downs National Park Trust, the official charity of the National Park, will also support the Outdoor Learning Grant, which every year allows thousands of schoolchildren to enjoy an outdoor learning experience in the South Downs. Without the grant, many schools would not be able to afford to provide a school trip.

OSB Group is a leading specialist mortgage lender employing over 2,000 people worldwide. It has offices across the south east and some very close to the National Park in Chichester, Fareham and Fleet.

Next year staff from the bank will be rolling up their sleeves and volunteering to help National Park Rangers carry out conservation work.

Jonathan Couch, Head of Communities Impact and ESG Communication Specialist at OSB Group, said: "OSB Group is thrilled to partner with the South Downs National Park Trust. Their vital work not only protects our environment but also inspires young people to connect with nature, fostering healthier, happier communities."

James Winkworth, Head of Charity at the South Downs National Park Trust, said: "It's the season of goodwill and this is a wonderful gift to this precious landscape that's adored by so many.

"So much of the National Park's important work relies on donations from businesses. This support from OSB Group will make a real difference, particularly to our fight against biodiversity loss. Many of the children we help are from inner-city areas with little green space and have never had the opportunity to visit a National Park before."

Climate grants are back!



Grants of up to £5,000 are now up for grabs for projects across Lewes district that help climate action, nature and sustainability.

The "Community Pitch" returns for its second year to support projects that help the environment and reduce carbon footprint. Previously, this covered projects in the Ouse Valley Climate Action area that follows the River Ouse downstream from Barcombe, through Lewes to the coastal towns of Seaford, Peacehaven and Newhaven.

Thanks to £50,000 funding from Lewes District Council, a second funding pot has been created enabling applications from the entire Lewes district this year.

A range of organisations are being invited to apply, including community groups, clubs, parish and town councils, social enterprises, community interest companies, charities, schools and businesses delivering non-profit projects.

The initiative, in which applicants will need to produce a one-minute video pitch about their idea, is being led by the Ouse Valley Climate Action (OVCA) partnership, supported by funding from South Downs National Park Trust and Lewes District Council.

Last year six projects took a share of the funding, including transforming waste ground to a community vegetable garden, improving facilities for cycle parking, offering a sustainable eCargo scheme in Lewes and giving women an option to use plastic-free period products.

Awards start at £500 and go up to £5,000.

Steph Mills, Project Manager for Ouse Valley Climate Action, said: "We're open to all kinds of projects that help the environment in the wider Ouse Valley. It could be anything from reducing waste and encouraging recycling, to supporting wildlife, encouraging walking and cycling or increasing energy efficiency.

"There's a huge amount of ambition to do more to help the environment and tackle climate change, but local groups often lack funds. This is where the Community Pitch can make a real difference. Good luck to everyone!"

The deadline for applications is **21 February 2025**. Apply [here](#).

Did the Romans make wine from South Downs grapes?



Many of us will be raising a toast this festive season as we gather round with family and friends and it may even be a bottle of South Downs bubbly! Anooshka Rawden, the National Park's Cultural Heritage Lead, takes a look at the history of vineyards in the South East region.



The Domesday Book, published in 1086 and comprising the Great Survey of lands in England and Wales, gives us a valuable picture of 11th century landscape and society. You can get a sense of the

fertile soils of Sussex, through its woodlands, mills, meadows and land under the plough. What Domesday also records is vineyards, recording around 45 - and all in South-East England. It's likely that there were more than this number, given Domesday was not exhaustive of all places in England and Wales.

Today, Britain boasts over 700 vineyards and 160 wineries according to the National Association for British and Welsh Wine Industry, making the 45 vineyards of Domesday seem small by comparison. Well over 50 of them are in the South Downs National Park.

What do we know about winemaking in our history? There is certainly evidence that vineyards were a feature of the British landscape under the Romans, with archaeological analysis of pollen recording the presence of viticulture.

Even with the possibility that not all vineyards were recorded in Domesday, it is probable that from the Norman conquest of 1066, there was an increase in numbers. Domesday notes a number of vineyards as 'new' in 1086, and certainly the 12th century historian, Henry of Huntington, recorded that Winchester was known for wine production, and as no vineyards are documented in Domesday for Hampshire, this again points to the suggestion that under the Normans, viticulture grew.

Wine was central to daily life in this period. It was therefore a product imbedded in cultural practice, and related to this, there was a strong commercial incentive

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for wine production linked to high demand. It was used as part of religious rites such as the mass, where wine is a requirement of communion. It was also diluted, creating an everyday drink to quench thirst. The agricultural calendar included space for viticulture, with medieval calendars recording September as winemaking month.

One big question, especially in trying to understand the boom of viticulture today, is the role of climate change in creating the conditions that enable adaptation of agricultural practices to include wine production. In the 1st century AD, the Roman writer Tacitus (Agricola 12) records that Britain was "obsured by continual rain and cloud" but that "with the exception of the olive and vine, and plants which usually grow in warmer climates, the soil will yield, and even abundantly, all ordinary produce."

Fast forward several hundred years and the Medieval Warm Period, which occurred between c. 950 to c. 1250, does seem to correlate with a rise in vineyards in Southern Britain. The so-called Little Ice Age of the 14th century, which is often seen as the reason for the decline in English winemaking was also one of the most disastrous centuries for human health and social cohesion with the toll of the Black Death.

Political and commercial considerations will also have played a role. Even when Medieval English wine production was at its height, it faced stiff competition from French imports, especially when, from 1154, French territories including the duchy of Aquitaine (and its wine-rich region of Gascony), was added to the English crown on the accession of Henry II. Vast quantities of wine arrived into Britain via ports including Southampton, and the English crown were able to levy significant duties on wines arriving from Bordeaux.

What the comparison of Domesday Sussex with viticulture today shows is that people have always adapted to change and to any opportunity that comes with change, whether driven by climate, commercial or cultural factors, and just as Medieval monks and farmers tended the vines in Sussex in the 11th century, today we are seeing cultivation of an ancient practice for new markets.

Christmas competition!

This month we're giving away a fabulous bottle of Upperton Nebula sparkling wine, lovingly made right here on the sunny slopes of the South Downs National Park.



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

Those who are already signed up can email "Mistletoe and Wine" to newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk before midnight on 31 December.

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

Give a gift that restores nature: Biodiversity Credits in the South Downs



Are you struggling for gift inspiration this Christmas and looking for something a little bit different?

Did you know you can actually buy your very own piece of nature restoration that's guaranteed for 30 years?

As part of the National Park's Voluntary Biodiversity Credits scheme, we're offering a chance to fund the creation of a new woodland habitat.

Sarah Westbrook, Nature-based Solutions Officer for the National Park, explained: "This is a really unique opportunity to support nature recovery in the South Downs.



"By buying a Voluntary Biodiversity Credit, you would be giving a loved one a share in the restoration of the iconic Iford Estate, near Lewes, which is working hard to create new habitats such as woodlands so that wildlife can thrive once again.

"Voluntary Biodiversity Credits are a way for individuals and organisations

to contribute voluntarily to nature by investing in specific environmental projects, all supported and regulated by the National Park Authority.

"We appreciate this is a Christmas present with a difference and won't be in everyone's price range, but it's certainly a gift that will leave a lasting legacy over many decades. It could be that you consider giving it to a loved one as a joint present and these credits are also open to businesses and community groups to purchase."

The cost of one Voluntary Biodiversity Credit is £170, which secures a 3x3 metre parcel of land for nature

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recovery. Each credit is mapped with its own unique reference and secured formally to ensure it remains in place for at least 30 years.



Sarah added: "From biodiversity loss to climate change, the Iford Estate's restoration projects address some of the most pressing environmental issues of our time.

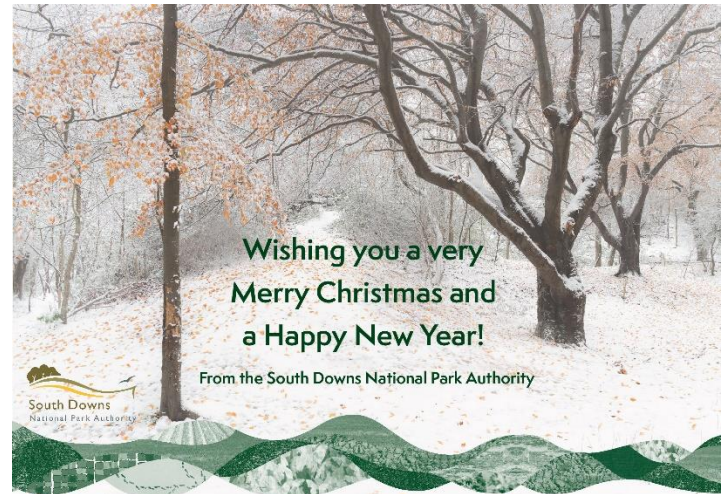
"The South Downs National Park has an ambitious goal of securing 33 per cent of land managed for nature by 2030 and this gift directly contributes to its success."

You can find out more here:

<https://earthly.org/projects/iford-estate-woodland-creation>

Anyone interested can contact Sarah at sarah.westbrook@southdowns.gov.uk

And finally...



Thank you taking the time to read our newsletter this year and we look forward to sharing more stories and updates from your National Park in 2025!

Picture credits

P1 Schoolchild – Anne Purkiss; P2 right Giles Embleton-Smith; P3 Becka Saunders; P4 left Ron De'Ath'; P4 Right Jamie Fielding; P5 left Sam Moore; P7 left Nigel Symington