

SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

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This month:

- **Celestial delights** Find out the winners of our annual astrophotography competition and find an event near you for the hotly-anticipated Dark Skies Festival!
- **Wondrous wetlands** Learn more about a £1.7m project to restore precious aquatic havens.
- **Love is in the air!** Discover some ideas for romantic trips to the National Park.
- **Win an annual pass!** Get a family ticket to Winchester's amazing heritage venues!

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

Breathtaking winning photos of Dark Skies

A dazzling display of the Milky Way at Cuckmere Haven and a hauntingly beautiful shot of the legendary Chanctonbury Ring are among the winners of this year's astrophotography competition.

This year broke a record since the contest's inception in 2020, with more than 200 entries of incredible night-time shots from across the South Downs National Park.

The astrophotography winners are being announced as the National Park's Dark Skies Festival kicks off this week, with an action-packed line-up of cosmic fun over the half-term holidays.

Among the highlights will be free stargazing events at

Seven Sisters Country Park, Queen Elizabeth Country Park and Alice Holt, celebrating nocturnal wildlife, the wonders of the solar system and connecting with the universe for wellbeing.

The South Downs National Park is one of only 22 International Dark Sky Reserves in the world. The status recognises it



as one of the most accessible places to see incredible views of the cosmos in the busy south east of England.

A double winner in this year's photo contest was Giles Embleton-Smith, from Eastbourne, who took the top £100 prize in the "Life at Night" category with "Chanctonbury Coven", an eerie image of the lichen-encrusted trees at the famous site that once was used as a Roman Temple and is reputedly one of the most haunted sites in England. Giles also won the "Magnificent Moon" category with a dreamy shot of a rising Cold Moon at Petworth Park.

The judging panel for this year's competition included Vicki Wells, a Member of the National Park Authority who worked on the BBC's *Sky At Night* programme, as well as Elinor Newman, a Dark Skies expert who organises the festival.

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Of the Chanctonbury shot, Vicki said: "This is a breathtaking photograph of trees at Chanctonbury. The Cold, December full moon reveals both lichen-clad trunks and etches stunning shadows at this wonderful and charismatic landmark."

Giles, who takes home £200, said: "I love exploring and finding new locations under the dark skies of the South Downs National Park. Chanctonbury Ring and Petworth Park are both beautiful areas offering different perspectives and composition for nightscape photography. I loved capturing these images and I'm absolutely delighted to have won both the magnificent moon and life at night categories in this prestigious competition."

Taking the top spot in the "Dark Skyscapes" category was Jamie Fielding, who wowed judges with his shot "To



Infinity and Beyond", capturing a spectacular night vista in the Cuckmere Valley.

Jamie, from Angmering, West Sussex, who takes home £100, said: "This was a shot I had been planning for over a year, waiting for the perfect time when the Milky Way rises over the south coast and aligns with the Cuckmere Valley. There's not a huge window of opportunity each year to get this shot. I was delighted with the results and feel lucky that we have this quality of dark sky in the National Park to capture shots like this, whilst only a matter of miles away from some major towns and cities. Winning this competition means a lot as there has been some excellent previous winners, so it's great to be recognised alongside them now."



The mobile phone category captured the pure joy of stargazing in the South Downs with a triumphant photograph of a family admiring the night's sky.

Emily Birtwisle, who wins £100, said: "After a very eventful 2024, my family and I came to the Seven Sisters for a few days for a little break.

"The scenery was absolutely gorgeous, and due to the early darkness we could make the most of the lack of light pollution and appreciate the stars. In this photo is the moon and Venus, with my cousins standing at the opening of Cuckmere Haven's beach."

Judge Elinor said: "The theme of this year's festival is glimmers, those small moments that bring us joy and wonder, and this image captures that sentiment. Seeing a dark sky in all its glory really is an uplifting experience!"

Meanwhile, three images were worthy runners-up, winning the photographers a £50 prize.

In the "Dark Skyscapes" category, Richard Murray, from Waterlooville, impressed judges with the aurora above St Hubert's Church at Idsworth, in Hampshire.

A stunning shot "Man Vs Galaxy", taken by Eastbourne's Lorcan Taylor-Hood, capturing the silhouette of a fellow photographer on the Eastbourne Downs, took second spot in "Life at Night" category (*pictured left*).

A Harvest Moon at Cowdray Ruins, in Midhurst, taken by Storrington photographer Andrew Gambling, was runner-up in the "Magnificent Moon" category.

And a well-composed black and white photograph of the groynes at Cuckmere Haven, taken by Keith Miller, won runner-up prize in the mobile phone category.

A number of images were highly-commended for their quality, uniqueness and storytelling. Carl Gough, from Littlehampton, wowed judges with two night-time views of castles in the National Park. Carl photographed the rare phenomenon of noctilucent clouds over Amberley Castle and also captured a shot of "Comet 12p Pons Brooks" at Arundel Castle.

Noctilucent clouds are collections of ice crystals – some 200,000ft up in the mesosphere – that stay visible at night because they are still reflecting sunlight due to their great height.



"Amongst The Stars", by Michael Steven Harris, was praised for depicting a rare wintry view of Fulking Escarpment on a recent January night. An image of a toad crossing the road at Exceat, East Sussex, taken by Peter Brooks, was also highly commended, along with a view of the Northern Lights at Beachy Head, taken by Rupert Kirby on his mobile phone.

Twenty shortlisted photographs will now go before the public to be crowned the "People's Choice" winner. The poll will open upon the conclusion of the festival on 23 February and the winner will take home £75.

For the full line-up of events and activities for this year's Dark Skies Festival, [click here](#).

This year the festival includes the launch of a new "Embrace the Darkness" podcast, hosted by Elinor Newman, and exploring different people's connection and experiences with the dark skies.

Hundreds have their say on Plan



Around 200 comments have so far been submitted to the National Park's Local Plan Review and well over 500 people have attended consultation events.

An eight-week consultation is under way, inviting people to have their say on how and where development takes place.

The award-winning South Downs Local Plan is being reviewed to ensure it's up-to-date and addresses important issues such as nature recovery, climate change, affordable housing and helping local communities thrive.

The public consultation of the Local Plan Review will run until 17 March. This is the main opportunity for people to help shape the final Plan, so the National Park is encouraging the public to get involved.

The remaining public consultation events are:

Wednesday, 12 February 3.30pm to 7.30pm – Petworth public exhibition, Leconfield Hall, Market Square, Petworth GU28 0AH

Saturday, 15 February 1.30pm to 4pm – Lewes public exhibition, Cliff Hall, 28 Cliffe High St, Lewes BN7 2AH

Monday, 24 February 4pm to 6.30pm – Midhurst public exhibition at the South Downs Centre, North Street, GU29 9DH.

The National Park Authority proposes to keep much of the existing Local Plan, including the emphasis on landscaped, which means that the nationally-designated landscape is considered in every planning decision. The Local Plan will continue to prioritise the provision of clean air, water, dark skies and food and a medium level of growth spread across the towns and villages of the UK's youngest National Park.



Tim Slaney, Director of Planning at the National Park Authority, said: "I'd like to thank everyone who has taken the time to get involved in the consultation so far.

"There's still lots of time to have your say, so please do come along to one of our events or head to the online consultation platform."

The web hub for the Local Plan Review can be accessed here: www.southdowns.gov.uk/local-plan-review

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY Hurrah for Hampshire Hedge!



We're halfway there!

That's the milestone reached in an ambitious project to create a network of hedgerows linking the South Downs National Park and the New Forest National Park.

Since CPRE Hampshire launched "the Hampshire Hedge" in 2023, scores of volunteers have been braving all weathers to plant and restore hedgerows. So far, almost five miles of hedgerow has been created, with 37,500 whips planted.

Once complete, the hedge will connect the two National Parks with a nature recovery corridor, linking woodlands, meadows, local nature reserves, and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).

'The value in engaging with so many landowners, volunteers and young people is incalculable. The reach of the project from a small but committed team has been incredible'

Chris Lickley, a Ranger for the National Park who has been helping the project (*pictured above right*), said: "The value in engaging with so many landowners, volunteers and young people is incalculable. The reach of the project from a small but committed team has been incredible!"

The project has kickstarted a remarkable ripple effect, as numerous local people are taking proactive steps to improve hedgerows across the county.

Over 500 plant species, 60 species of nesting bird, many hundreds of insects and almost all of our native small mammal species such as dormice and hedgehogs can find refuge in the humble hedgerow.

The Hampshire Hedge will also help mitigate climate change by capturing carbon, reducing flood risks, and preventing soil erosion.

Alison Talbot, Operations Manager at CPRE Hampshire, said: "The Hampshire Hedge is already visibly transforming the landscape, benefiting both people and nature and I would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who has joined our mission so far. And this is just the beginning really.

"Together, we're making a lasting impact on the countryside and creating a greener, future for all."

Wetland restoration is under way



An exciting £1.7m project to restore precious wetlands across the South Downs region and raise awareness about water is now under way.

Work on the “Downs to the Sea” initiative began in time for World Wetlands Day (2 February), with a bumper action plan to restore and create a network of “blue spaces” in the landscape.

It comes after National Lottery Heritage Fund awarded a grant of £1.7m late last year.

Downs to the Sea will help carry out much-needed restoration work to a number of internationally-designated wildlife sites, such as RSPB Pulborough Brooks and RSPB Pagham Harbour in West Sussex. The initiative will restore 15 ponds in the National Park to create biodiversity hotspots and support the movement of wildlife between sites, increasing resilience to a warmer and wetter climate.

A range of activities are also planned to connect people with waterways, including volunteering to help rivers and social prescribing to tap into waters’ benefits for health and wellbeing.

It comes as wetlands are under increasing threat from climate change, water usage, pollution, flooding,



drought, and fragmentation. Some two thirds of all freshwater species are supported by ponds and yet the UK has lost half of all its ponds since 1900.

The initiative is a partnership between the South Downs National Park Authority, South Downs National Park Trust, RSPB, Brighton & Hove City Council, Western Sussex Rivers Trust, and Writing Our Legacy.

Siôn McGeever, Chief Executive of the National Park Authority, said: “I’m so excited to see this brilliant project get lift-off. Alongside our partners, we’re looking forward to doing some really important work over the next three years to help improve our amazing wetlands.

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“The South Downs region is full of incredible blue spaces – rivers, streams, ponds, coastline and a huge aquifer – but like so many parts of the UK, these water environments are under increasing threat. In many places wildlife is just surviving, rather than thriving as it should be. This project will help turn that around.



“Having bigger, better wetlands will also be hugely important as we face a more uncertain climate.

“Ultimately, we want to increase awareness of the vital role that water plays in all our lives, connecting people to water for its health and wellbeing benefits and helping to upskill local communities to be able to look after our waterways.”

Downs to the Sea has two main strands: water in the landscape and water in people’s lives. On the landscape side, a number of schemes are in the offing:

- Wetland Restoration in the Arun Valley – delivering vital restoration works on a string of functionally-connected nature reserves down through the Arun Valley to the coast, at RSPB Pulborough Brooks and Amberley Wildbrooks, and at Ferry Pool wetlands, part of RSPB Pagham Harbour and RSPB Medmerry.
- Up to 15 dew pond restorations across Hampshire and Sussex, working with landowners.
- The restoration of the historic village pond at Falmer, led by Brighton & Hove City Council.

On the people side, there will be:

- Volunteering and apprenticeship opportunities around the monitoring and maintenance of watercourses.
- The creation of “Water Champions” to help lead community-based action and raise awareness of the importance of water in the landscape.
- A range of activities, including social prescribing, to help people experiencing loneliness, anxiety and depression.
- Schools will receive fun and interactive assembly presentations and workshops, supporting the National Curriculum Rivers topic with local information and ideas on how they can help their water environment.
- Led by Writing Our Legacy, there will be creative opportunities for those who may not have had access to wetlands before. Working with artists from Black, Asian and ethnically diverse audiences, the creative project will explore and respond to the Arun Valley and its wider landscape and heritage.

For updates on the project visit

www.southdowns.gov.uk/downs-to-the-sea/

Volunteers help protect heritage

Learning more about radical thinker



A new museum opens its doors in Lewes this month and is inviting the community to get involved.

Thomas Paine: Legacy is opening a museum and Centre for Democracy at Bull House, which was Paine's Lewes home from 1768 to 1774. By drawing attention to Paine's vision, and Sussex's role in fostering democratic thought, the Centre will use history to empower present and future citizens. The centre will include a museum, education programmes, creative workshops, events, exhibitions, and a community gathering space.

This 18th-century thinker and writer was born in Thetford, Norfolk, and lived in Lewes for six years. His time in Lewes was hugely influential on Paine and is where he wrote his first political pamphlet *The Case of the Officers of Excise*. This was part of the first national unionised action anywhere in the world.

He now holds a pivotal place in American history. Arriving as a penniless immigrant in Philadelphia in November 1774, Paine's life changed when he published *Common Sense* in January 1776. This pamphlet lit the touch paper of revolution and galvanised the colonists to fight for a new nation, a nation that Paine himself would name the 'United States'.

Paine is well known in the States, featuring in museums, street names and Hamilton the Musical, but is not currently well known in the UK. As well as his participation in both the US and French Revolutions, he also produced important social justice writings that proved well ahead of their time, including *The Rights of Man*.

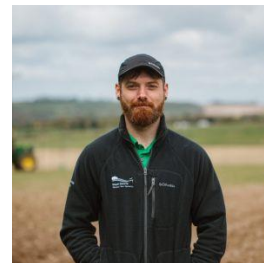
The **new museum** will be having a soft launch to gather community engagement before the official opening later this year. Bull House will open its doors from 20 to 22 February from 11am to 3pm. Entry is free.

Each day there will be a short history presentation by the Director at noon and at 2pm there will be an opportunity to hear more about the plans for the centre and contribute ideas. For further details, and to hear about volunteering opportunities, please email

info@thomaspainelegacy.org



The lumps and bumps of the South Downs are very often hugely important archaeologically, the last remnants in the National Park's landscape of bygone cultures. Assistant Ranger Oli Tonks writes about a recent volunteer task to help conserve three burial mounds.



Our National Park volunteers were out en masse recently to clear bramble that was smothering three tumuli – or burial mounds – in the western reaches of the National Park.

Found within a stand of hazel, ash and red cedar the tumuli sit

in an opening that, with a bit of work, could be a significant glade habitat, allowing rare woodland species to emerge and giving diverse flora a chance to thrive.

Clearing the vegetation allows for the tumuli to be fully appreciated too, making them much more recognisable in the setting.

At the same time clearing the saplings and trees that are establishing on the barrows prevents roots from penetrating and damaging the historic features.

Some patches of bramble were left in the glade, as they are an important habitat in themselves that provide shelter and food for numerous species.

The volunteers, raring to go, cut routes through the thicket of bramble before claiming a tumulus each and beginning the up-and-down brushcutting task to reveal the monuments' form. We had our keen rakers on hand too, to shift the arisings into compostable heaps at the perimeter of the glade, to remove nutrients from the area but also serving as refuge for invertebrates and small mammals. The hard work and determination of our volunteers meant by the end of the day all three of the tumuli were cleared, awaiting spring to spark life back into the wildflowers wanting to flourish.

We were also very lucky to witness a kestrel taking advantage of all the commotion, with a juvenile hovering above one of our volunteers watching for any mammals that may emerge from the removal of covering bramble, and swooping down at the right moment to seize a meal for itself. Not so lucky for the mouse! (cue *The Circle of Life*).

Three cheers for apprentices!

"An unforgettable day..."



Nicola Garrard is a teacher at Minority Matters, a school which offers free maths and English classes to struggling families. The Fittleworth resident recently helped to organise a trip to the National Park

for 17 children from London. Here she describes the day and its profound impact on the young people.

A group of five girls and thirteen boys from London visited Hesworth Common, near Fittleworth, to volunteer their time and learn more about the beautiful South Downs National Park.

Led by Clive Murray (who helps manage Hesworth) and local Scoutmaster Kevin MacKenzie, they enjoyed a day of exciting new experiences and tough physical challenges: using loppers, bow saws and pruning saws; cutting rhododendron and building a dead hedge; pulling up birch and pine seedlings to protect the heather.

The children, aged between 11 and 15 years, come from Finsbury Park, where they attend a school called Minority Matters, which in addition to free Maths and English classes, offers mentoring, parent support groups, and CV skills building to struggling families.

The children were stunned by the natural beauty of Hesworth Common but most of all, they loved meeting walkers' pet dogs. They threw themselves into hard work and made the most of the opportunity to



learn new skills and develop confidence. The teenage boys, in particular, were thrilled to be asked to cut down a small tree in sections using saws, to allow the heather beneath it to flourish. They showed great maturity and listening skills as they learned to work safely with the equipment.

The weather couldn't have been more perfect with cloudless blue skies and bright autumn sunshine! Between volunteering activities, the children had some time to rest, eat a picnic at the viewpoint, identify leaves and run around. They continued working until the light began to fade and enjoyed hot chocolate and biscuits in front of a beautiful sunset.

A huge thank you to Fittleworth neighbours who loaned essential equipment, and Clive, Kevin, and the adult volunteers from London who gave up their Sunday to give these children an unforgettable day, instilling a love of nature and the importance of protecting it for the future.

And, of course, thank you to the children themselves for working so enthusiastically for a place so far from home!

For National Apprenticeship Week, we caught up with Kirsten Fewings, a Business Administration Apprentice for the National Park Authority.



Can you tell us more about your apprentice role?

I'm a business administrator apprentice, in the support services team. I work two days on reception which involves answering telephone and email enquiries about a whole array of things from planning to general questions about the National Park. I also greet and chat to the visitors that come to the South Downs centre. Whilst on I reception I also handle post coming in and out of the building ensuring it reaches the correct person.

I also work with the Comms Team. At the moment I am supporting them with their Dark Skies Festival by creating equipment lists, answering enquiries about the various Dark skies events and helping to collate attendance figures.

Why did you choose an apprenticeship?

I wanted to do my apprenticeship with the National Park because the South Downs have been a special part of my life. I grew up just down the road from the South Downs Centre and spent many hours as a child exploring the Downs with my family. As an adult, I still very much love to explore the Downs with my husband and dog.

Back in the summer I decided to do some volunteering with SDNPA with the central rangers and loved every second of it. It felt amazing to know that I am now contributing to the conservation of the Downs I grew up in.

What do you think are the benefits?

You get to learn new skills, on the job and earn money whilst you are doing so. You instantly open yourself up to a huge range of opportunities when you start an apprenticeship, and you have a large support network around you. The South Downs National Park is an organisation full of people willing to help you learn and achieve your best.

What's been the highlight of your time so far?

My highlight so far as an apprentice has been the warmth I received from not only my team but the organisation. From the day that I started my role I have felt welcome and as though I belong.

What are your future aspirations for your apprenticeship?

My future aspirations are to not only develop as a business administrator but also as a person.

A landscape brimming with romance



From Jane Austen to Tennyson, the beauty of the South Downs has never failed to inspire tales of romance and passion.

The golden chalk hills, immense views and twinkly star-studded skies are the perfect place to enjoy a romantic outing for Valentine's Day.

Couples really are spoiled for choice in the South Downs. Apart from the fact that the landscape is stunningly serene and provides a romantic backdrop to any trip, there are so many things to do that cater for all interests and budgets. It could be as simple as romantic hilltop stroll along the South Downs Way or a cosy dinner by the fire at a pub, right up to an immersive wine-tasting experience, a relaxing spa break and how about a spot of wildlife watching?



Here are five ideas for a romantic trip:

Watch the sunset

It may still be "wrap up" weather, but February is a gorgeous time of the year to enjoy the South Downs as nature slowly wakes from its winter slumber and the days get longer. Why not take a flask of hot chocolate and treat your partner to a sunset stroll at Seven Sisters (stay well away from the cliff edge!), Old Winchester Hill (gazing down to the Solent) or enjoy the breathtaking views of the south coast from Cissbury Ring? Find a nice spot and surprise your partner with a homemade cake (we promise it doesn't have to be heart-shaped!)

Make a wish upon a star!

Naming a star after your sweetheart is a beautiful notion that has become a Valentine's favourite in recent years.

Luckily, in the South Downs National Park, there are plenty of stars to see in all their glory! An International Dark Sky Reserve since 2016 and one of only 22 in the world, the area offers majestic views of the constellations.

There are 10 Dark Sky Discovery Sites to choose from in the National Park, all offering free parking and open access to a great evening of stargazing.

Why not pop along to one of our free events during the Dark Skies Festival?

Enjoy a winetasting experience

Did you know the South Downs is England's premier winemaking region, boasting well over 50 vineyards?

Why not treat your partner this February to a winetasting experience at one of the National Park's many wine estates? Our chalky soil is perfect for producing sparkling white wine and is similar geologically to a well-known winemaking region in France. Cheers!

Pedal power

There's something very connecting about going on a bike ride as a couple and it can be a real adventure (provided you stay at similar speeds!)

For a taster of South Downs cycling try one of our [circular ride leaflets](#) – there are plenty of options to suit all fitness levels. Among the most popular cycle routes are the Meon Valley trail, Centurion Way, and routes around Lewes.

If you don't have a bike, there are some cycle hire options, including at Seven Sisters Country Park.

[Cuckmere Cycle Company](#), an independent bike shop located at the country park, offer bike hire, starting at £15 for 2 hours, including a helmet, water, maps and advice on where to go! As well as their existing fleet of bikes, they also offer bike hire for those with additional mobility needs. They have a range of options, some electrically assisted, with a variety of seating positions.

Soak up the magic of history

With medieval castles, majestic stately homes and magnificent monuments, the South Downs is oozing with history that cannot fail to evoke emotion.

And an amorous trip to the South Downs wouldn't be complete without a visit to the home of one of the world's most celebrated novelists, Jane Austen.

Jane Austen's House Museum, in Chawton, Hampshire, is a delightful day-out, offering a glimpse into the genius who penned *Pride and Prejudice* and imagined the world's most famous romantic hero, Mr Darcy.

Art galleries are always a romantic affair and the South



Downs is blessed with some of the finest artwork in the world. Perhaps the most acclaimed is the collection at Petworth House, a gem inspired by the Baroque palaces of Europe. Spend an hour, or several, admiring the masterpieces of Titian, Blake, Gainsborough and Turner.

Not forgetting of course castles like Arundel ([above](#)) and Amberley that look straight from a fairytale, there are so many places to capture that mushy selfie! Happy Valentine's!

The fascinating story of flint



The story of South Downs flint and its pivotal role in human civilisation has been uncovered in a fascinating new book.

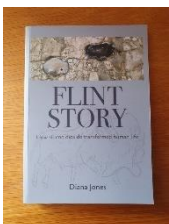
Diana Jones penned "Flint Story" after carrying out an excavation of a large collection of flint tools in West Sussex as part of her university dissertation.

Diana explained: "I found studies of flint to be highly specialised and not very accessible, so set out to write a narrative for people who'd never thought of prehistoric flint, and what it had enabled humans to do, as a subject of interest."

The book describes how flint was formed in the chalk and how human-worked tools made from flint first came to be recognised in Europe. It relates stories of Ice Age landscapes, mines and firelighting, as well as accounts of antiquarians, collectors and experimenters. The book highlights the phenomenal range of objects fashioned with tools, often inspired by interconnectivity with nature's creatures and processes: from cave, rock shelter and portable art to hunting weapons, personal adornment and the first musical instruments.

Diana, who is an independent researcher with a degree in landscape archaeology from Sussex University, said: "Walking the hump-backed contours of the South Downs may be one of our greatest outdoor pleasures, but how many of us know about a once vital human resource buried deep beneath its springy turf?"

"Flint is most evident in the eroding chalk cliff faces at coastal sites such as Cuckmere Haven or Birling Gap. It's a cryptocrystalline mineral that bears an incredibly long legacy of use for toolmaking – in Britain, stretching back almost a million years. But it was also a mineral that knew no boundaries. Its slow evolution in the hands of early humans was enacted in similar ways throughout the European continent, to which we were so often attached, as well as around the world."



Diana added: "A good place to start your appreciation of flint is to visit Worthing Museum, which has a great collection of prehistoric tools, as well as a display about self-taught, local archaeological hero John Pull."

Flint Story is available from **Natural History Book Service**



Nestled at the edge of the South Downs, Winchester holds an unrivalled position in the history of England.

Ancient capital of Alfred the Great's Anglo-Saxon kingdom, powerhouse of medieval monarchs, resting place of Jane Austen and immortalised as Wintoncester in Hardy's Wessex, the city and its heritage are unique.

Any visitor to Winchester looking to delve deeper into its history is spoilt for choice for places to visit, but the first port of call for most is The Great Hall. Once part of William the Conqueror's Winchester Castle, in the late 13th century Edward I commissioned what has become the building's defining feature: the Round Table. Captivated since his youth by chivalry, on a visit to Winchester in 1516, Henry VIII ordered *'the repair of the Great Hall and the Round Table there'* with King Arthur modelled on the likeness of a young King Henry and the Tudor rose prominent in the centre. A short walk from The Great Hall is Westgate Museum, where a fine painted ceiling commissioned by Winchester College in anticipation of a visit by Henry's eldest daughter, Mary I, and Philip of Spain on the occasion of their marriage in Winchester in 1554 is on display.

Meanwhile, City Museum tells the story of Winchester's early origins as an Iron Age trading centre, the fifth largest city in Roman Britain and its Anglo-Saxon glory during the reign of Alfred the Great. In the year that we celebrate the 250th anniversary of the birth of Hampshire's most famous daughter, Jane Austen, on display are some of her few remaining personal possessions: two of her purses, embroidered by her own hand, and her personalised ivory spool case.

Hampshire Cultural Trust, which runs the venues, is offering a Historic Winchester Super Explorer family ticket to *South Downs News* subscribers. The ticket gives free entry for a family of up to five people to its Winchester heritage venues for a whole year.

People signing up to the newsletter during February will be automatically entered into the draw to win the ticket. Those who are already signed up can email "burnt cake" to newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk before midnight on 28 February. Sign up to the newsletter [here](#) and see competition T&Cs [here](#).

Things to do in the South Downs this February

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/



Snowdrops at Chalton (by Becka Saunders)

- Embrace the darkness and head to one of our events during the Dark Skies Festival! [See the full programme here.](#)
- Step back in time and head to [Lewes Castle](#) for a range of family-friendly activities during the half term holiday. Solve a medieval mystery, craft your own royal crown, and witness thrilling displays of medieval life.
- Head to [Gilbert White's House and Gardens](#) for its popular snowdrop weekend on 15 and 16 February. There will be half price admission for all during the weekend. The museum will be also be running a penguin trail during half term!
- A new exhibition opens at [Petersfield Museum and Art Gallery](#) on 18 February. In the first exhibition of its kind, there will be an overview of the life and work of the internationally renowned bookbinder Roger Powell OBE (1896-1990), who worked on exquisite books at his bindery in nearby Froxfield from 1947 onwards. The exhibition will spotlight the tradition and innovation involved in bookbinding, a practice that dates back thousands of years.
- Head to Petersfield Community Garden on 22 February for a [celebration of all things trees](#). Petersfield Climate Action Network are hosting the event, allowing those who have purchased fruit trees to collect them, and offering all visitors the opportunity to benefit from free advice and expertise. There will be free demonstrations, craft stalls, lichen trails, activities for children, and refreshments.
- 2025 marks 100 years of [Drusillas Park!](#) To kick off its 100 year celebrations, the wildlife park, near Alfriston, is inviting kids for just 100 pennies (£1 entry) throughout February half term!
- Are you aged 16 to 25 and want to make a difference to help local wildlife? Join us at our [Nature Recovery Event](#) at the beautiful Seven Sisters Country Park. Immerse yourself in the wonders of nature as we explore the stunning landscapes and diverse wildlife of the Seven Sisters area. Whether you're a nature enthusiast or simply looking for a day of outdoor adventure, this event on 22 February offers something for everyone!

Pic credits

P4 Avocets Tim Squire; P7 left Tim Kahane; P7 swans Philip Nind.