

SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

HELP US TO #RENATURE

SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK

WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **History everywhere!** Discover the wide range of events taking place this month to celebrate the amazing heritage and stories across the National Park.
- **Commitment to heritage** Learn about a new joint pledge to protect the area's history.
- **Autumn adventures** Get ideas on fabulous days-out in the National Park this season.
- **COMPETITION!** Win a trip to the stunning Rathfinny Wine Estate.

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

Discover the amazing heritage of National Park!

Amongst the lumps and bumps in the ground and historic buildings of the South Downs are stories spanning many thousands of years.

Did you know humans have used the South Downs Way, which runs along the chalk ridge, for roughly 5,000 to 8,000 years, making it an ancient route of travel?

Across those millennia, great civilisations and eras have come and gone, including the Romans, Normans, Tudors, Victorians and many more.

All have left their mark on the landscape, towns and villages and today there are countless historical destinations to explore and learn more.

Heritage Open Days in September are a great opportunity to learn more about this incredible region – without breaking the bank as many of the experiences are free!

Here is a selection of some fabulous days-out on offer for the festival, which runs between 11 and 20 September.

Coultershaw Heritage Site



Prebooking not required

Come and marvel at the inspiring engineering of our historic beam pump, waterwheel and water fountain before admiring the 21st century state of the art



Lewes Castle, which was started between 1067 and 1069

water turbine making renewable energy. All in all, a jam-packed weekend that showcases all that our stunning heritage site has to offer.

Children's craft activities and refreshments are available in the old canal warehouse on both days.

Saturday 12 September:

1100-1630

Sunday 13 September:

1100-1630

Petersfield Museum and Art Gallery

Prebooking not required.

Discover the rich heritage of Petersfield and the wider Hampshire area by meeting a range of museums, local

history societies, archaeology groups, conservation organisations and community heritage groups, all gathered together in the museum's historic courtyard.

Explore displays, discover local history projects, learn about volunteering opportunities, and find out how these organisations preserve and share the stories of our communities. Many stalls will feature historic objects, demonstrations and interactive activities for all ages.

Visitors can also enjoy hands-on object handling sessions,



including archaeological finds and artefacts from the museum's handling collection, as well as free entry to the Edward Thomas Centre.

Whether you're a lifelong history enthusiast or simply

looking for an interesting day out, this is a great opportunity to meet heritage organisations from across Hampshire, discover the work they do, and be inspired by the history and heritage on your doorstep.

Friday 11 September:

1000-1600

Saturday 12 September:

1000-1600

Wednesday 16 September:

1000-1600

Thursday 17 September:

1000-1600

Friday 18 September:

1000-1600

Saturday 19 September:

1000-1600



Uppark House

Prebooking not required

Enjoy free entry to Uppark House – a beautifully preserved 17th Century house, where each room holds

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layers of history, stories, and everyday life from centuries past. Explore the beautiful gardens and take in the stunning South Downs views.

Sunday 13 September:

Site Open 10.00-16.00 House open 10.30-15.00

Monday 14 September:

Site Open 10.00-16.00 House open 10.30-15.00

Fernhurst Furnace

Pre-booking not required

This Wealden Blast Furnace site has recently been conserved, and there will be guided tours to explain what happened, when ships' cannons were made here and why the conservation project was required. There are many other attractions, including a demonstration of how to load and fire a musket, as well as pole lathe wood turning, beam hewing from a round tree trunk, wool spinning, living history re-enactment and much more. Refreshments will be available, which include tea and cakes, roast lamb and a veggie alternative, all washed down with local beer.



Saturday 12 September:

1030-1700

Sunday 13 September:

1030-1630



Anne of Cleves House Museum

Pre-booking not required

This stunning house was given to Anne of Cleves at the end of her short-lived marriage to Henry VIII – although she never lived there.

Explore well-preserved interiors including a Tudor kitchen, a light and airy parlour, and a beautiful bedroom complete with four poster bed.

Take advantage of the selection of dressing up clothes to find your inner King or Queen and bring the historic surroundings to life.

Learn about Sussex life through a fascinating collection of historic domestic artefacts. Then stroll through the garden, which is inspired by a traditional Tudor planting scheme and includes herbs, shrubs and fruit trees appropriate to the Tudor period.

Friday 11 September:

10am – 4pm

Saturday 12 September:

10am – 4pm

Sunday 13 September:

10am – 4pm

Lewes Castle & Museum

Pre-booking not required

Visit Lewes Castle, a Norman Castle built after the Battle of Hastings by supporters of William the Conqueror.

Climb the steps to reach The Keep for stunning panoramic views across Sussex. As you ascend, explore the history of this 950-year-old fortress and how it played a key role in the development of the town.

Visit the adjoining Museum of Sussex Archaeology to view artefacts from prehistoric to medieval Sussex, plus temporary exhibitions that showcase treasures from our collections.

Discover the story of Lewes through a delightful model of the town and short film.

Don't forget to bring your picnic to enjoy in the lovely gardens. Why not see if you can spot a very special cannon in the grounds?

Friday 11 September:

10am – 5pm

Saturday 12 September:

10am – 5pm

Sunday 13 September:

10am – 5pm

For more day-out ideas

visit www.heritageopendays.org.uk



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New pledge to protect history



Wolstonbury Hill, which has prehistoric enclosures

Increasing opportunities for people to connect with history and championing the role of heritage in nature recovery are among the goals of a new nationwide pledge.

National Parks across the UK have joined forces with leading heritage and environmental bodies to protect, explain and bring to life the nation's historic environment.

An updated **Joint Statement** commits signatories to manage the historic environment sustainably and to help more people connect with the stories, landscapes and cultural heritage that shape National Parks.

Anooshka Rawden, Cultural Heritage Lead at the South Downs National Park, explained: "The Joint Statement recognises that the historic environment – historic assets from the past, whether bowl barrows or medieval field systems – are not simply survivals from the past but important evidence for how societies have responded to change over time."



"As we face increasing challenges around adapting to a changing climate, restoring space for nature, managing floods and droughts, and ensuring we can provide food and amenity, it's increasingly recognised that we can learn so much from how people have navigated change historically. The joint statement both showcases the collaboration across National Parks in England, Wales and Scotland, and centres the potential for historic data and evidence to help us make decisions for the landscape today and into the future. You can't write the next chapter without having read the book."

It comes as research by Historic England shows that around a quarter of the 575 Scheduled Monuments in the South Downs are in a declining trend.

Claudia Kenyatta and Emma Squire, co-CEOs of Historic England, said: "Heritage and nature are inseparable in our National Parks, and this shared commitment reflects that. By working together, we can make sure these places are not only protected for future generations, but that more people – wherever they come from – can discover, understand and feel connected to them."

Beautiful bird bounces back from brink in National Park



It's an iconic bird symbolising love at Christmas and has inspired countless writers and musicians, from Shakespeare to Annie Lennox.

But the long-adored turtle dove is on the brink of extinction in the UK and urgent efforts are now under way in the South Downs National Park to help the species recover.

In late spring, 30 doves were released in an undisclosed location near Selborne, in Hampshire, which was once the stomping ground of the great naturalist Gilbert White.

The doves, which are Europe's only migratory dove species, are already making themselves at home, churring, laying eggs and flying around the area.

This coming autumn the dainty birds are expected to fly 3,000 miles to their overwintering grounds in sub-Saharan Africa as they negotiate a journey across France, Spain and Morocco.

It's hoped the turtle doves will return next year as landowners, farmers, National Park Rangers and other partners have created suitable conditions for the birds to flourish, including new ponds, managed hedgerows and scrubby areas for nesting and feeding.

In the meantime, plans are afoot for another turtle dove release next year in the same part of Hampshire. It's hoped around 100 birds can be cared for in an enclosure under the watchful eye of the landowner and a dedicated team of volunteers, ready for release in spring 2027.

The inspiring project is a partnership between the landowner, the Selborne Landscape Partnership – which is a group of farmers and landowners working together to improve the local landscape and wildlife – together with the National Park Authority and the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) for the south east.

Paul Bushell, a Ranger for the South Downs National Park, explained: "We all know the turtle dove from the festive carol, but the truth is they are now far too rare for such a Christmas gift.

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"This stunning, colourful bird would once have been fairly common across the South Downs landscape. However, they are now one of the fastest-declining bird species in Europe due to habitat loss, predation and hunting, with numbers plummeting by 98 per cent in the UK between their peak in the late 1960s and 2023.

"There are still small numbers of turtle doves living in the National Park and we hope that careful releases like this can help create a new and much-needed South Downs stronghold for this red-listed bird.

"The western side of the South Downs National Park, in and around Hampshire and beyond, is

particularly suitable for this farmland species, which loves woodland edges, arable, scrubby, hedgerowed habitat with ponds nearby.

"This has been a real team effort between partners, volunteers and local communities and we'd like to thank everyone who has been involved."

To help the turtle doves settle in, "weedy" wildflowers that turtle doves love to eat have been planted, including fumitory, birds foot trefoil, vetch, red and white clover. Turtle doves need accessible, shallow freshwater for drinking and bathing near to nesting sites, so seven ponds were restored last winter with a further 14 being restored this coming autumn, within the local area.

Paul added: "The turtle doves that have been released seem really happy. They really are a spectacularly beautiful bird and the males produce the most enchanting churring sound during the breeding season. It is such an incredible and moving experience to see and hear the birds back in the landscape where they belong."

The landowner, who is part of the Selborne Landscape Partnership and wishes to remain anonymous, said: "I supported this project because I really care about all the bird populations and wider wildlife. It saddens me to see where we have habitat loss and dwindling numbers but with the local group of farmers, we are restoring the habitat for wildlife to flourish and I would do it again, for any of these species that belong in the UK environment. Sparrows and starlings are also all equally important but the beautiful turtle doves have been in shocking decline and we want to bring them back from the brink."

Nature recovery alongside landowners and partners is a key element of the South Downs National Park Authority's **Partnership Management Plan** and our ongoing **ReNature** campaign.



The splendour of autumn in the South Downs National Park



"Autumn is my season, dear. It is, after all, the season of the soul"

Famous words from the celebrated writer Virginia Woolf, who retreated to the South Downs for her literary inspiration and loved long tranquil walks in the chalk downland.

Woolf linked the transitioning nature of autumn to a deeper inner calmness. The approaching season really can be a wonderful time to enjoy gentle activities that soothe the soul before the bite of winter hits.

September and October are particularly lovely months in the National Park and, after a scorcher of a summer, most of us will appreciate some cooler, rainier days with some autumn mists, muddier tracks and stunning sunsets. Due to the intense heatwaves and drought, the National Park is not alone in experiencing a "false autumn", with many crunchy leaves already on the ground and trees putting on a show of brown and orange hues.

We're sharing four restoring activities to really appreciate the magic of this time of the year in the National Park.

Autumn photography

With so much woodland, the spectacle of colour in the South Downs never fails to disappoint and it's the perfect time to get out and enjoy some photography, whether flying solo or with friends or family.

Entries close for the National Park's photo competition on 31 October, so there's still plenty of time to enter the competition for a chance to win £250.

This year the theme is **"Serene South Downs: Back to Nature"** and judges will be looking for breathtaking images that celebrate the National Park's serenity and those moments of slowing down and taking stock. As always there will be a dedicated wildlife and youth category, as well as a new special monochrome category, supported by Rachael Talibart's f11 Workshops.

Renowned Brighton-based photographer Finn Hopson, who is one of the competition judges, shared some tips for autumnal photography.

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He said: "For maximum serenity it may be worth heading out when the wind drops, or when there may be a bit of magical mist floating around.

"Get out early, stay out late. There's nothing quite like being the only one watching the sun come from the top of the Downs, or having the woods all to yourself on a peaceful morning. Similarly there is plenty of serenity to be found overnight, with the moon, the Milky Way or just a few nightjars for company.

"It's worth learning more about the flora and fauna in your local area. Paying attention to the smaller details and noticing seasonal change can be a wonderful mindful practice and can bring a deeper appreciation of the quieter aspects of the landscape."

You can enter the competition

here: www.southdowns.gov.uk/care-for/photo-comp/

Woodland walks

Crunchy leaves underfoot, radiant colours, dappled sunlight, trees bejewelled with berries, nuts and seeds, and that unmistakeable earthy smell of autumn – there's something so special about a woodland walk at this time of the year.

The South Downs has more woodland than any other National Park in England or Wales, so there's plenty of treescape to choose from!

A woodland stroll is good for all the family and a chance to escape the daily treadmill of life without breaking the bank. It's also proven to reduce stress hormones in adults and children alike.

If you want to go one step further with your woodland walks, forest bathing is a great option and has been found to lower blood pressure and depression while increasing energy levels.

Some of the best woodlands for an autumn stomp in the National Park include:

- [**Queen Elizabeth Country Park**](#) – walk idea [here](#)
- [**Alice Holt**](#)
- [**West Walk**](#) – walk idea [here](#)
- [**Stansted Forest**](#) – walk idea [here](#)
- Singleton Wooded Estates – walk idea [here](#) (best to get the bus as limited parking!)
- [**Stanmer Park**](#) – walk idea [here](#)



- **Friston Forest**

And it doesn't just have to be walking. Forests can be great places to go for a morning workout, run or cycle, or even a calming meditation session. To learn more about forest bathing check out these **tips** from Forestry England.

Fungi spotting

Autumn is the best season to see the weird and wonderful fruiting bodies of fungi, thanks to the damper conditions and cooler temperatures.

The fruiting bodies look amazing, but most of their living matter is actually underground.

In the soil they take the form of a mass branched filaments called 'hyphae' that extend and intertwine with one another to collectively form a network called the 'mycelium'. If you have ever kicked up a pile of leaves and noticed something that looks like cotton wool stuck underneath, that is mycelium! It spreads through the soil in search of organic matter to break down and feed on.

Some of the best places to see fungi are in one of the South Downs' many woods, heathlands or close to historic churches.

Many of our UK fungi are toxic to humans, so please do not attempt to forage or eat any unless you are with an expert and have the correct permission!

Stargazing

After long summer days, the beauty of the South Downs night sky really comes alive in the autumn.

October is a particularly good month for stargazing and Saturn will reach the pinnacle of its visibility. If you have a telescope, it's a great opportunity to see the rings!

During the autumn, our nearest galactic neighbour, the Andromeda Galaxy, will be visible high in the southern sky and Hercules and Perseus are also great targets to look for.

Come November, "the Seven Sisters" – not the South Downs version but the celestial version – will come into full view. The Pleiades is the most easily recognisable star clusters in the night sky. The brightest stars in the Pleiades asterism (pattern of stars) glow a luminous blue, and are bright enough to be seen with the naked eye!

Wrap up warm, take a hot flask, and enjoy connecting with nature on its grandest scale! Our **Dark Sky Discovery sites** are great places to start your stargazing



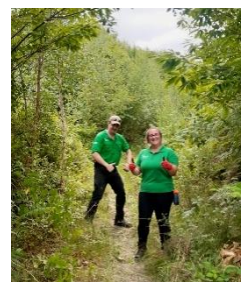
Update on the Serpent Trail



We're so well-known for the South Downs Way as it's one of the best and most accessible trails in the UK. But did you know we also have another popular trail inspired by the reptilian fauna of South Downs heathlands? The 65 mile / 106 km Serpent Trail is a walking route designed to highlight the outstanding landscape, wildlife and history of the greensand hills. Passing through purple heather, green woods and golden valleys, simply follow the Serpent Trail way marker discs to explore some of the most breathtaking countryside in the South East. **Ranger Dominic Sunderland gives a quick update on what's been happening on the trail this summer. If you fancy checking out the trail visit [here](#). Autumn is a great time to explore!**

Some 1,200 runners braved the heat to take part in the Serpent Trail race earlier this summer. This is an annual race that sees runners take on distances between 10km - 100km along the length of the Serpent Trail from Haslemere to Petersfield.

SDNPA rangers attended to give a talk to runners about the National Park, the importance of our heathland habitats, and the rare species that call it home. We were then set up at the Trotton checkpoint for race day itself, providing much-needed support and supplies to the runners as they passed through.



The National Park Authority has a group of volunteers who walk the Serpent trail regularly to check its condition. We worked alongside event staff in the weeks ahead of the race to ensure it was in good condition for runners – namely checking waymarkers and clearing encroaching vegetation.

Linking up our remaining heathland habitats in the Weald, the Serpent Trail is a focus of work for the Central Ranger team. We look for opportunities for nature recovery alongside the trail to enhance its condition and deepen people's connection to the habitats that they pass through. 😊

Ponies help boost biodiversity



A herd of Exmoor ponies have been helping to improve biodiversity at a nature reserve in the National Park.

Earlier this summer, 800 metres of fencing was installed at Mill Hill Local Nature Reserve, near Shoreham, to create a dedicated grazing area to help restore the special chalk grassland landscape.

Conservation grazing is a slower, gentler approach to land management, using livestock rather than heavy machinery.

The ponies have been tackling plant overgrowth and invasive species that have begun to dominate Mill Hill's chalk grassland - an internationally-important habitat that, when thriving, supports a diverse range of wildlife, including more than 20 species of butterfly in just one square metre.

The conservation project has been led by Adur and Worthing Council working in partnership with the National Park Authority.



Last autumn and winter, the site welcomed 60 Herdwick sheep, which quickly became a favourite with visitors.

After their important grazing work this summer, the Exmoor ponies will make way for the Herdwick sheep to return this autumn, winter and early spring.

A spokesman for Adur and Worthing Council said: "This project is a great example of the partnership working at the heart of our Vision for Nature, published last year, which sets out landscape-scale ambitions to protect and improve our area's natural environment.

"By working together, we're delivering long-term benefits for nature, wildlife and the communities that enjoy these special places."

Win tour and tasting at vineyard!



Rathfinny Wine Estate crafts vintage Sussex Sparkling wines on a perfect single-site vineyard in East Sussex.

Founded in 2010 by Mark and Sarah Driver, the family-run estate sits in the Cradle Valley in the rolling South Downs, just three miles from the sea near the iconic Seven Sisters cliffs.

Competition

Win a sumptuous Winter Tour & Tasting at Rathfinny Wine Estate for two people! **All new subscribers to Rathfinny's newsletter, or South Downs News, until midnight on 30 September will be entered into the prize draw.**

Good luck to everyone who enters!

T&Cs:

- All competition entrants and beneficiaries redeeming the prizes must be 18 and over and must be signed up to the Rathfinny Wine Estate & South Downs National Park newsletters.
- Prize includes a Winter Tour & Tasting for two guests.
- The prize is non-transferable, non-refundable and cannot be exchanged for cash or any alternative.
- Dates: Must be redeemed between 28th October 2026 – 29th April 2027
- Times: Fridays 12.00pm or Saturdays 10.30am, 1.00pm, 3.00pm, subject to availability
- Amendments & Cancellations: Booking dates can be rearranged up to 7 days in advance.



Things to do in the South Downs this September

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/



A beautiful September sunset on the Sussex Heritage Coast (photo by Sam Moore)



Writer Alinah Azadeh

- Head to Warren Hill dew pond on Saturday 12 September for a two-hour creative writing workshop with award-winning writer and artist Alinah Azadeh (pictured left). The **"Up From Paradise" session** is being run by Towner Eastbourne.
- "A Greener Screen" at Chichester Cinema returns this month until the middle of October with an exciting line-up of environmental films, local organisations, children's workshops and talks. The programme will explore some of the biggest environmental challenges facing the planet, while shining a light on the people and projects working to protect and restore the natural world much closer to home. For the full programme and tickets, visit <https://chichestercinema.org/>
- The **"Adder Dash"** will take place on 19 September from The Old Racecourse in Lewes. A 13 km run through the rolling hills and woods of the National Park, all event profits will be donated to the South Downs National Park Trust and the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust, helping support conservation projects and ongoing maintenance of the landscape.
- Coming up next month, we'll be in full Spooky South Downs mode! Stansted Park, near Rowlands Castle, will be hosting a **special outdoor cinema screening** of the 1993 Halloween classic *Hocus Pocus* on 3 October. Gather your friends, get comfy, and prepare for a wickedly fun evening of laughs, magic, and Halloween nostalgia! If you're looking for something scarier, the 80s classic *Lost Boys* will be **screened on 2 October** at Stansted.

Pic credits:

P3 Right Historic England; P5 left Christopher Pearson; P6 left Verity Stannard; P7 left Adur and Worthing Council.