

SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

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SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK

WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **Newly revamped trail opens!** Learn more about the new section of the Centurion Way and ongoing plans to give everyone improved access to the heart of the National Park.
- **Heritage Open Days** Find out some of the best free days out this September.
- **Community spirit** Learn about the grassroots projects benefitting from National Park funding.
- **TWO COMPETITIONS!** We're giving away a holiday in a cabin and luxury South Downs jewellery!

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

Full steam ahead as trail is opened to the public!

A once-bustling Victorian railway station has been renovated as part of an extended cycling and walking trail in the South Downs National Park.

During the 1800s people would alight at Singleton Station in all their finery for a day at the Goodwood Races. The charming station even hosted the likes of the Prince of Wales, who became Edward VII, on his trips to the West Dean Estate.

Rather than trains and top hats, it was a fleet of cyclists and community leaders who tried out the new section of the Centurion Way, finishing at the former railway station for a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

The Deputy Lieutenant of West Sussex, Simon Knight, was joined by Vanessa Rowlands, Chair of the National Park Authority, project partners and stakeholders to declare the new section of the route officially open to the public. The trail is intended for all to enjoy, including families,



dog-walkers, mobility scooter users and wheelchair-users.

Following three years of extensive work by the National Park Authority, the Centurion Way



has now been extended northwards from West Dean, passing Singleton and ending near to Cucumber Farm. The improvements include almost 2km of new trail, two new entry and exit points and around 1.5km of newly-widened pathway alongside the A286 for pedestrians. Education boards along the extension tell the history of the railway line and signage will direct people to nearby local amenities, such as West Dean Gardens, Weald and Downland Living Museum and Singleton village.

The Centurion Way follows the old, dismantled Chichester to Midhurst Railway Line, which was fully closed in 1991.

Further refurbishments will take place over the next two to three years to extend the route to Cocking Hill and linking with the South Downs Way. Once complete the route will provide a continuous route for walkers and cyclists from the heart of Chichester and beyond from

Chichester Harbour and the Witterings to the South Downs Way.

Mr Simon Knight DL said: "This marvellous addition of a new section of the Centurion Way has been achieved through remarkable collaboration."

Vanessa Rowlands, Chair of the National Park Authority, said: "This is a fantastic new section of the Centurion Way, linking up with train and bus connections, creating the opportunity for a sustainable, car-free day out in the National Park."



Ian Graham, Director of West Dean Estates, said: "It's hard to believe that just five years ago this station was disused but, thanks to a shared vision, teamwork, passion and

determination from the whole project team, we've demonstrated just what true partnership working can achieve."

Please be aware that there is no car parking at the Singleton Station site and people are encouraged to walk, cycle or use public transport. The 60 Bus Route runs regular services with stops nearby along the A286.

To coincide with the new section opening, the original arch near to Bishop Luffa school was refurbished and reinstalled to welcome people to the trail at Chichester. The arch had to be taken down a decade ago and was rescued from storage.

With support from the Friends of Centurion Way, Southsea-based blacksmith Peter Clutterbuck took on the restoration challenge, creating a new structure from galvanised steel and guaranteeing a longer lifespan than the original. Original mythical character sculptures, including Roman gods and a dancing deer, have been reinstated within the new archway.



Ian Swann, from Friends of Centurion Way, said: "The arch will stand for decades to come and we look forward to celebrating the next section to Cocking Hill in the coming years."

The new extension connects with existing footpaths, for pedestrians only, to Singleton and then northwards through the Drovers Estate. Cyclists are required to turn around at the endpoint of the new extension, near to Cucumber Farm, as there is currently no onward connection and no access to the A286 via the farm. Cyclists should return to the station site to exit the trail or leave via the new connection near to West Dean Tunnel. Further extensions of the Centurion Way will provide onward connections for cyclists.

For project updates visit this [webpage](#).

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Safety warning at river mouth



Visitors are being urged not to cross dangerous fast-flowing currents at the mouth of the River Cuckmere in East Sussex.

The warning comes after several recent incidents where visitors to Seven Sisters Country Park have crossed the river and got into difficulties in the fast-flowing water.

It can be deep water and unpredictable as the river meets the incoming tide.

Videos of people crossing the river, unaware of the risks, have been posted on social media.

It comes amid a social media trend for the "Seven Sisters Hike" with people walking from Seaford along the coast.

The South Downs National Park Authority, alongside HM Coastguard, is urging people to use the designated footpaths to admire the views on either side of the river.

Claire Onslow, Commercial Manager for Seven Sisters Country Park, said: "We want everyone to enjoy this stunning location safely. It's been very concerning to see groups of people crossing the water and often being knocked off their feet by the strength of the currents.

"The river mouth is hugely unpredictable and should never be used as a footpath.

"There are no lifeguards and it's an unnecessary risk to enter the incredibly fast-flowing, often very cold, water.

"A lot of people are trying to get the best view of the cliffs and we have designated routes to get to these viewpoints on either side of the river.

"We have lots of information on the best routes at our visitor centre, as well as on our [website](#)."

The designated route is to follow the **English Coastal Path** around Cuckmere Haven, which includes the Seven Sisters visitor centre, toilets and the chance to pick up refreshments.

Senior Coastal Operations Office Mike Kerley, from HM Coastguard, said: "There is the very real chance of being swept out by the current or tide, suffering cold water shock, or encountering an obstacle under the surface."

In case of an emergency, call 999.

Discover the amazing history on your own doorstep



The historic village of Alfriston

As we glide into autumn and a little more routine settles into our weeks, it's a fantastic time to enjoy a day-out and learn about the history around us.

Every September scores of volunteers across the National Park organise events to celebrate the amazing heritage of the South Downs region, showcasing everything from archaeology, to historic homes and churches, to military history and museums.

A great chance to discover some hidden gems, Heritage Open Days are taking place across the UK from 12 September to 21 September and many venues will be offering free entry.

The South Downs has some 5,000 years of human habitation, so there's all sorts of heritage and often where you might not expect it.

The seemingly humdrum lumps and bumps in the ground often reveal ancient Roman field systems, while burial mounds linked to Bronze Age peoples and even Vikings are dotted across the National Park.

Then, of course, there's the striking heritage on show for all to admire – there are well over 5,000 beautiful listed buildings, spanning Norman to Victorian times, plus more than 160 Conservation Areas, making our towns and villages a journey through time and the many weird and wonderful stories that have shaped these places. Those stories are often echoing through the street names, churchyards, local architecture and paraphernalia.

So, why not take a trip into yesteryear and find out more about the amazing history on your doorstep?

Here are some of the Heritage Open Days taking place across the South Downs this September.

EAST SUSSEX

Seven Sisters Country Park – Military Heritage Talk & Tour

Seven Sisters Country Park Visitor Centre, East Dean Road, Exceat

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16 and 18 Sep Pre-booking required

Join local historian Ian Everest for a leisurely walk exploring the incredible military history of Seven Sisters Country Park.

Alfriston Clergy House Archaeology Finds

Alfriston Clergy House, The Tye, Alfriston

20 Sep 2025 Pre-booking not required

A wonderful opportunity to see the eclectic mix of the archaeological finds that have been discovered across the site. From medieval pieces through to the early 1900s, there is a fascinating mix of items to view.

WEST SUSSEX

"Cathedral of the Downs"

St Mary's Church, Sompting

12 to 19 Sep Prebooking preferred

The Church, sometimes known as the "Cathedral of the Downs", is normally open once a week for visitors and once a month for a service. For as many days as possible in September, it will be open for longer and with occasional tours. There's been a church at Sompting since before the Norman conquest of the 11th century. The oldest part of the building is the Saxon Tower, which has stonework that has been dated as pre-1000AD.

The Flintstones

The Trundle Kennel Hill Car Park, Kennel Hill, Singleton.

21 Sep 2025 Pre-booking required

A gentle 5.5 mile walk, literally and metaphorically, unearthing the story behind flint otherwise known as 'Hampshire/Sussex Diamonds'. After this walk you will never look at a flint wall the same way again!

HAMPSHIRE

Hampshire Cultural Trust store tour with a Regency twist

Chilcomb House, Chilcomb Lane, Winchester,

18 Sep 2025 Pre-booking required

Tour of the Hampshire Cultural Trust collections held at the Chilcomb House stores with a focus on Regency period items in celebration of the 250th anniversary of Jane Austen's birth.

Free entry to Gilbert White's House & Gardens

High Street, Selborne

18 Sep 2025 Pre-booking not required

Enjoy a day exploring the home of writer and naturalist Gilbert White for free!

The Great Hall with the Westgate Museum

The Caste, Castle Avenue, Winchester, Hampshire, SO23 8UJ

13 Sep 2025 Pre-booking required.

See the legendary King Arthur's Round Table.

Find out more days-out in the National Park [here](#).

Big boost for grassroots community projects



Training local teachers to become outdoor leaders, a citizen science project to monitor river pollution and new educational boards are among the exciting projects to benefit from a National Park fund.

A range of initiatives across Sussex and Hampshire have been awarded grant funding from the Sustainable Communities Fund (SCF). The dedicated community fund continues to go from strength to strength and is a partnership between the South Downs National Park Trust, the official independent charity for the National Park, and the South Downs National Park Authority.

Just over **£4,600** was awarded to **Chichester Forest School**, a community interest company, to run a series of training days at Kingley Vale National Nature Reserve. The days will train local teachers, as well as upskill existing outdoor leaders, to deliver nature-based sessions to enhance wellbeing and mental health in children. There will be a special focus on nature connection in woodlands. The serene yew woods at Kingley Vale are among the oldest in Europe, dating back almost 2,000 years to when the Romans first invaded Britain.



Meanwhile, **more than £3,000** was awarded to **Eco Rother Action** for a project to monitor sewage spills on the River Rother between Midhurst and Petersfield. Local



volunteers will monitor e-coli bacteria as part of the citizen science project and the data will be supplied to the Western Sussex Rivers Trust and the Environment Agency to

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help them target areas of the river where their efforts are most needed. The SCF panel agreed that the initiative will support the work of other agencies to protect and maintain the river.

In the west of the National Park, **£10,000** was awarded to the **Hampshire Magnificent Meadows Project**, run by CPRE Hampshire, to deliver a programme of engagement around helping to protect the rare chalk grassland of the South Downs. One of the reasons for the designation of the National Park, chalk grassland is often called “Europe’s rainforest in miniature” as just a tiny patch can be teeming with over 20 butterfly species and up to 40 different wildflowers. The engagement programme includes meadow management and hay-making activities with a wide cross-section of the community.



And finally, in West Sussex, just over **£2,500** was awarded to **Steyning and District Community Partnership** to install two information boards at Steyning Memorial Playing Field. The panels will signpost visitors towards the South Downs, raising awareness of the special qualities of the National Park and provide sight-seeing information about the historic town.

Laura Sercombe, who sits on the SCF panel and is Director of Landscape and Strategy at the National Park Authority, said: “There are so many wonderful community-led projects springing up across the National Park, many of them involved in wildlife conservation, providing a “natural health service” to people, climate action and creating recreational opportunities for everyone to be able to enjoy this amazing National Park.



“These grassroots projects often struggle for funding and that’s where the Sustainable Communities Fund can make a huge difference.

“I’m thrilled with the latest successful applications and can’t wait to see the positive outcomes from these inspiring projects.”

The panel will next meet in October to consider the latest applications.

For more information on the Sustainable Communities Fund and to find out about applying for a grant visit <https://southdownstrust.org.uk/the-sustainable-communities-fund/>

Dark Skies diary...



The National Park's very own "Queen of Darkness" Elinor Newman looks at what's coming up in our Dark Skies as the nights draw in!

As the year turns towards the autumn equinox and the nights lengthen, the darkness returns (pause

for dramatic music) and thoughts turn towards all things Dark Skies.

There are a few events that may be of interest:

- 16 September, **Bats and Biofluorescence Walk** at Iping/Stedham Common with Ranger Jake Barnes and Queen of Darkness Elinor, 7-9pm.
- 25 September, **Sunset Bat Safari** at Shortheath Common with the HeRe SAMM team, 7-9pm.
- 28 October, **Things that Glow bright at night:** Biofluorescence night walk at Weavers Down with the HeRe SAMM team, 5.30-6.30pm.

We have some great possibilities for meteor showers coming up over the autumn, and a (hopefully) spectacular lunar eclipse:

- Monday 22 September - Autumn Equinox. The time of the year when day and night are equal.
- Tuesday 7 October - Full Moon (Hunter's Moon)
- Wednesday 22 October - Meteor Shower: Orionids. These peak around this date but have quite a broad peak so any clear nights around this date should be good. These meteors come from Halley's Comet.
- Wednesday 5 November - Full Moon (Beaver Moon), supermoon - full moon occurs close to perigee so the moon looks bigger and brighter than normal full moons.
- Thursday 4 December - Full Moon (Cold Moon), supermoon.
- Sunday 14 December - Meteor Shower: Geminids. These peak on 14 December, often one of the best meteor showers to view.
- Sunday 21 December - Winter Solstice. The Sun reaches its most southerly sunrise/set and is at its lowest point in the sky. The longest night and the shortest day.

Details of our 10th anniversary as an International Dark Sky Reserve are coming together and we look forward to announcing celebrations in the near future. In the meantime, put **12-22 February 2026 in your diary for the 2026 Dark Skies Festival!**



New art exhibition opens



A new exhibition exploring the South Downs Way through inspirational artworks opens this autumn.

Every Step of The Way has been curated by artist-curators, Tim Craven, Deborah Richards and Melanie Rose, to illustrate walking the 100-mile-long national trail from Eastbourne to Winchester.

The exhibition is structured around the 11 sections of the trail and features artwork from 33 artists, each responding to 'The Way' through the lens of creative practice.

The Novium Museum, in Chichester, will feature 14 artworks while the Weald & Downland Living Museum, in Singleton, will feature 42 artworks.

Visitors are encouraged to attend both venues to see all of the pieces. These include Jeremy Gardiner's 'Beachy Head II' (*pictured above*), an acrylic piece on handmade cotton tag paper — on display at Weald & Downland Living Museum — and Frances Knight's 'Ditchling Beacon', an oil on canvas piece, which will be on display at The Novium Museum.

The Novium Museum also features artefacts from the museum's archaeology collection relating to the history of the South Downs, including finds from excavations across the South Downs Way.

Councillor John Cross, from Chichester District Council, said: "We're so lucky to live in such a beautiful and environmentally diverse landscape. This exhibition will allow our visitors a unique journey across the South Downs Way through the medium of art, and I hope people are inspired to rediscover this wonderful route or visit part of it for the first time."

The exhibition at Singleton will open on 22 September and admission is included in the museum entry charge.

The Novium exhibition opens on 11 October. Admission is free, with donations welcome. To accompany the exhibition, the museum will be running a series of **art workshops**. A series of free walks will also be taking place with The Ramblers. For more information and to book, please visit: www.sws-ramblers.org.uk

Win a stay at country cabin!



If you haven't visited yet, Westerlands is a **regenerative, family-run farm near Graffham, West Sussex, where everyone is welcome.** The farm itself has been on a transformative journey, having evolved from a former racehorse stud into a haven for biodiversity and wellbeing.

Westerlands' **vision for the next twenty years**, as set out in its **Whole Estate Plan** (WEP), has recently been endorsed by the South Downs National Parks Authority as a 'blueprint' for protecting nature and marks a significant step forward, both in sustainable land stewardship and community engagement.

Westerlands is the perfect place to set off along the captivating pathways of the South Downs, either on foot, on horseback or by bike - or admire the expanse of the stars above. With a unique collection of sustainably-built cabins, shepherd huts and cottages for **farm stays** to suit all budgets - some even with their own outdoor baths - each carefully considered space offers a grounded, rustic setting for guests to relax, reconnect and enjoy back-to-nature experiences.

As well as their **wellbeing escapes and seasonal stays**, they offer a range of **activities** for visitors, including outdoor sauna and aquifer-fed plunge pool, wellness treatments, outdoor exercise sessions and a fully-accredited equestrian centre. Experience the magic of nature, connection and healing. Find out more at www.westerlands.com.

AUTUMN STAY GIVEAWAY!

We've teamed up with Westerlands to run a September prize draw to win a two-night weekday stay at their **beautiful off-grid Timber Country Cabin**.

There are a number of ways to enter the competition! **All new subscribers to the Westerlands AND the National Park newsletter during September will be automatically entered into the draw.** Sign up to the Westerlands newsletter [here](#) and sign up to the National Park's newsletter [here](#). Those who are already signed up can email "Retreat into Nature" to newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk before midnight on 30 September. See competition T&Cs [here](#). Westerlands prize draw and accommodation **T&Cs** also apply.

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Competition! Win bespoke jewellery from South Downs

At the foot of the South Downs, just a stone's throw from Ditchling Beacon, are the unique workshops and gallery of luxury jewellery designer and bespoke jewellers Pruden and Smith. Founded by third generation silversmiths, Pruden and Smith blend their 100-year legacy of craftsmanship with unique and unusual jewellery designs inspired by the Sussex landscape.

Their signature Trap (Sussex Shore) Collection, designed by Rebecca Smith, is inspired by the look of pebbles trapped in wood along the ever-changing shorelines of the Sussex coast. The organic curving forms evoke the natural contours of the rolling Sussex downlands, and the ephemeral coastal strandline. Using hammering techniques for a unique finish on each piece of jewellery, this range has been designed to embrace the irregularities of nature. Each design is handmade in Ditchling using recycled gold and platinum.



Pruden and Smith design with the future in mind, from their eco-conscious approach, to their ethos of investing in legacy, they steer away from fast fashion and instead create timeless designs that become heirlooms for future generations. This ethos is also reflected in their redesign service. Whether you have treasured pieces that are too worn or damaged to wear, inherited jewellery with a sentimental story, or even simply items that you no longer wear, Pruden and Smith's redesign service provides the opportunity to breathe new life into your collection by incorporating your own metal and gemstones into new designs. The redesign journey starts with a free consultation with a designer. To book a free design consultation, call 01273 846338 or visit prudenandsmith.com.

WIN SUSSEX-INSPIRED JEWELLERY!

Pruden and Smith are offering the chance to win stunning Trap Diamond Stud Earrings (worth £280) to newsletter readers.

These 6mm square earrings featuring six 1.2mm round diamonds are inspired by the Sussex landscape and were handmade from recycled silver and 9ct yellow gold in Ditchling.

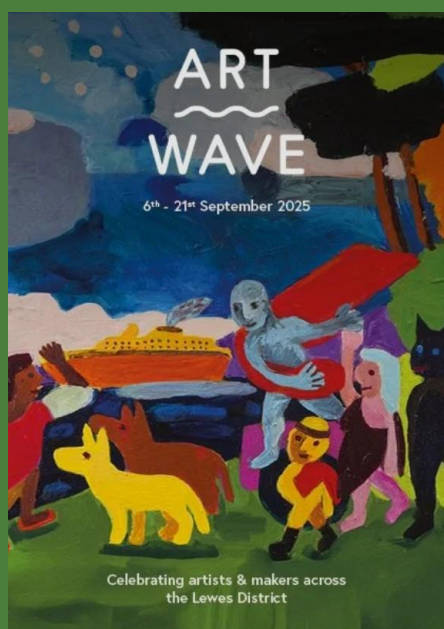


People signing up to the newsletter during September will be automatically entered into the draw to win the jewellery. Those who are already signed up can email "Pruden and Smith" to newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk before midnight on 30 September.

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

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/



- Calling all art-lovers! The **32nd Artwave Festival** returns with 163 free-to-visit exhibitions and open studios across the Lewes District. Enjoy the trails until 21 September, and discover work by nearly 1,000 artists and makers across this creative corner of the National Park. Continuing its founding mission to make the arts accessible to all, Artwave welcomes a new generation of young creatives this year, with 20 venues featuring work by artists aged under 25!
- Are you aged between 16 and 25 and looking to gain some volunteering experience for your CV? Join us on one of the National Park's **free Youth Action Days!** The next one takes place on Saturday, 27 September in the beautiful landscape of Seven Sisters Country Park. Discover the hidden treasures of this scenic location through guided nature walks, where experienced guides will share their knowledge about the local flora and fauna. Get hands-on and contribute to the ongoing nature recovery projects, helping to preserve the unique biodiversity of Seven Sisters.
- Are you interested in local history? A new archive opens at **Petersfield Museum and Art Gallery** on 30 September and runs until Christmas called "Where the Light Falls: Winifred Joseph's Rural Archive". The archive features over 1,000 negatives capturing the life of an artistic circle in Petersfield between the two world wars. Taken mainly by Winifred Joseph (1894-1966) at the home of Dr Harry Roberts, an East End-based doctor, the house in Hampshire named 'Oakshott Hangers' became a much-used country retreat from the capital.
- **Coming up next month** – are you inspired by the South Downs and interesting in weaving? "Weaving the Downs: A Beginners Weaving Workshop" takes place on 11 October at the Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft. Discover the gentle rhythm of weaving in this hands-on day workshop inspired by the colours and textures of the South Downs. Led by museum educators, this relaxed introduction is perfect for complete beginners or anyone looking to reconnect with making. **Book a place here.**

Pic credits:

P1 and 2 Sam Moore/Middleton Press; P4 Anne Purkiss; P5 left Michael Harris