Mike Robinson
The TV chef on life out of the limelight in Frilsham

Ridgeway walks and rural rambles
Step-by-step walks through picture-postcard scenery

Local Products Directory
Find your nearest bakery, brewery or beehive

Kennet and Avon Canal
Celebrating 200 years

A GUIDE TO THE ATTRACTIONS, LEISURE ACTIVITIES, WAYS OF LIFE AND HISTORY OF THE NORTH WESSEX DOWNS – AN AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

2010
Welcome to one of the most beautiful, amazing and varied parts of England. The North Wessex Downs was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1972, which means it deserves the same protection by law as National Parks like the Lake District. It's the job of my team and our partners to work with everyone we can to defend, protect and enrich its natural beauty.

Part of the attraction of this place is the sheer variety – chances are that even if you're local there are still discoveries to be made. Exhilarating chalk downs, rolling expanses of wheat and barley under huge skies, sparkling chalk streams, quiet river valleys, heaths, commons, pretty villages and historic market towns, ancient forest and more... everyone will have their favourite place.

As a newcomer, hardly a week passes but I discover another hidden gem. My favourite so far has to be the southern reaches of the North Wessex Downs, with their secret valleys, quiet hamlets and folding chalk hills crowned with magnificent woods.

Beautiful landscapes like these were made by people – at Avebury you can walk in a landscape visibly inhabited by our ancestors for 5,000 years. Today it’s vital we find ways of reconciling modern prosperity with conservation of what we’ve inherited. Particularly in economically tough times, there’s always pressure to trade off what’s beautiful for short-term profit. To misquote Thomas Jefferson, the price of beauty is eternal vigilance. Part of what AONBs are for is to show that beauty really can bring prosperity, and tourism is a key part of that.

So ‘Welcome’, I hope you enjoy this fabulous place, and thank you for your part in protecting it for the future.

Henry Oliver, Acting Director, North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
2010 is the International Year of Biodiversity, when many organisations including museums, theatre companies, protected landscapes and wildlife trusts are encouraging us to learn more about the rich diversity of life on Earth. This year has been dedicated to biodiversity in order to encourage people to discover why biodiversity is important for a healthy environment, and enjoy getting involved in hands-on activities to monitor and conserve the local wildlife. Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BROWT) is celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2010. You can take part in events at the Trust’s reserves including Hungerford Marsh, Inkpen Common and other locations listed on www.bbowt.org.uk or call the head office on 01865 775476.

Spring and summer are good times to visit Hungerford Marsh Nature Reserve, which is a refuge for a rich array of wetland birds and wild flowers. More than 120 species of birds have been recorded at this riverside setting. Look out for heron, water rail, kingfisher, little grebe, moorhen and mute swans. Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust and Wiltshire Wildlife Trust also host public events throughout their areas. For information about events in Hampshire visit www.hwt.org.uk or call 01489 774400. For events in Wiltshire visit www.wiltshirewildlife.org or call 01380 725670.

More information about the International Year of Biodiversity visit www.biodiversityislife.net.

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Be inspired by beautiful art

The Oxfordshire Geotrail, a new circular route starting and finishing at Wittenham Clumps and incorporating the Thames Path, gives a unique view of the complex diversity of soil in this part of the North Wessex Downs AONB.

The Geotrail, created by Oxfordshire Geology Trust as part of a national geotrail funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and managed by the Northmoor Trust at Little Hungerford, gives a chance for visitors to explore the ancient history of the area. The route begins on the chalk hills of Wittenham Clumps, also known as the Sinodun Hills, and descends to the Thames valley. After crossing the river, the route goes towards Dorchester across fine-grained dark brown alluvial soil.

The nearby Dyle Hills are the remnants of an Iron Age settlement. In 1870 Augustus Pitt Rivers saved the ramparts from total destruction. He was so incensed by a local farmer’s desire to plough them up that he started a National campaign to protect ancient sites. This led to the first legislation to protect archaeology and his appointment as the first Inspector of Ancient Monuments.

The eastern end of the Dyle Hills reveals chalky gravels derived from Jurassic limestones deposited during the last Ice Age. Many houses in Shillingford village are built of chalk clunch, a building material that flakes and weathers. The trail goes through Little Wittenham Wood where ponds are fed by springs at the base of the Upper Greensand, and climbs up Castle Hill where an uprooted tree reveals high level river gravels formed during one of the earlier Ice Ages.

The Oxfordshire Geotrail is just under six miles long and uses public footpaths. The Northmoor Trust serves refreshments in the Poem Tree café which is close to Project Timetable, a fascinating exhibition that explores the history of the local landscape and how the landscape might respond to a changing climate. Visit www.northmoortrust.co.uk for directions to the Northmoor Trust’s car park.

The outstanding natural beauty of the North Wessex Downs inspires many artists who portray the open downland, wildlife, rivers and villages through paintings, sculptures, jewellery, textiles, ceramics and photography. Marlborough Open Studios, or MOS, runs every weekend in July in conjunction with other cultural events in the town, including the Jazz Festival on 17 and 18 July. For more information visit these websites: Newbury Open Studios www.openstudios.org.uk Artweeks: www.artweeks.org/index.shtml HADCAF: www.hadcaf.co.uk Marlborough: www.marlboroughopenstudios.com

Our Forum

This year’s North Wessex Downs AONB Forum will be held in October.

Each year the Forum encourages people who are interested in the management and development of the North Wessex Downs AONB to discuss topical issues. Henry Oliver, acting Director, explains: “The Forum is an excellent opportunity for us to explain and discuss what we are doing with residents and representatives of a huge range of different organisations and businesses within the North Wessex Downs. We will highlight what we and our partners have achieved in the first year of the new Management Plan, and preview plans for next year.” Details of the Forum meeting will be posted on the North Wessex Downs website www.northwessexdowns.org.uk, or you can email info@northwessexdowns.org.uk or call 01488 685 640 to register your interest.

News

Celebrate the rich diversity of life on Earth this year by visiting nature reserves managed by local wildlife trusts.

Up on the North Wessex Downs 2010

Wildlife Trusts Celebrate Biodiversity

2010 marks the 200th anniversary of the Kennet & Avon Canal’s opening, celebrated with numerous public events.

Notable among them is the re-enactment on 5 June of the opening of the canal from Hungerford to Great Bedwyn. It marks the occasion on 2 July 1799 when a 50-ton barge laden with ‘coals and deals’ arrived at Great Bedwyn Wharf. According to a description of the day, ‘a large number of the inhabitants of Hungerford’ were on board and accompanied the barge. They were received at Great Bedwyn ‘with great demonstrations of joy’.

From 15 July to 30 September West Berkshire Museum in Newbury is staging an exhibition about the history of the canal, and the work of countless volunteers and engineers to restore the near-dilapidated waterway during the latter half of the 20th century. Other events will take place in Devizes, at Caen Hill, where a flight of 16 locks lifts the canal up a very steep hill, and in Bristol, Bath, Reading and Thatcham.

The celebrations culminate on 26 December with a grand party at Caen Hill, Devizes on the exact anniversary of the day when the canal was opened. For more information visit these websites: www.kennetandavon.org.uk or look for K&A 200 Celebrations.

The Kenton & Avon Canal is a significant waterway for wildlife, culture and heritage. There are seven Scheduled Ancient Monuments and hundreds of listed buildings on or alongside the canal, including Crofton Pumping Station. Turn to page 11 to find out more about this important waterway.
Walkers in the North Wessex Downs want more well-marked, circular routes, incorporating cosy pubs, tempting teashops and interesting attractions, according to research recently carried out by VisitWiltshire. We think the following routes on the next six pages should fit the bill perfectly…

**Invigorate yourself with two walks offering wonderful views across the open, rolling downland, woodland and intimate fields and lanes that create the enchanting and ever-changing backdrop to the Ridgeway.**

**ASHBURY WALK – THE LOWDOWN**

**Length:** 7.75 miles; **4 hours.**

**Terrain:** Tracks, field paths and minor village lanes and footpaths.

**Difficulty:** Fairly strenuous, including one relatively steep hill.

**Getting there:** By car – The walk starts in the car park on the Ridgeway a mile southeast of Ashbury where St Mary’s Church has a memorial to the Rev Thomas Stock, who created one of the first Sunday schools in England in 1777. From here and the remains of a Roman temple on the summit of Lowbury Hill. There are fine views from here and the remains of a Roman temple on the summit of Lowbury Hill. There are fine views

1. From the car park (see blue box left) walk northeastwards along the Ridgeway. Go over the first crossing of tracks and pass Wayland’s Smithy long barrow on your left. This megalithic tomb is thought to have been constructed about 2800 BC.
2. Turn right at the next crossing of tracks. Follow the track past woodland strips on the right and then on the left.
3. At the break in the woodland bear right across arable fields heading to the left of the woods on the far horizon. Cross a bridleway at an ageing signpost and after a second large field, cross a track also with an ageing signpost. After another field you come to a fence.
4. Go over the stile in the corner of the field and spot the weatherwane on your left. Bear left keeping the weatherwane to your left and the first coombe (dry valley) to your right.
5. To your right you will see the extraordinary Ashdown House (a 17th century Dutch-style house dedicated to Elizabeth, Queen of Bohemia). When you’re exactly between Ashdown House and the weathervane, bear half right and follow the ridge downhill to the stile by the road.
6. As the track turns left, carry straight on through the gateway and then along the fence line on your left. At the end cross the stile and continue.

**WHAT IS THE RIDGeway?**

Thought to be 5,000 years old and possibly Europe’s oldest ‘road’, the Ridgeway is a route many people believe stretches from the West Dorset coast to the Wash. The section within the North Wessex Downs AONB is part of the Ridgeway National Trail. Here the Ridgeway is dotted with pre-historic sites, including Avebury World Heritage Site at the western end of the Trail and the Iron Age fort atop Ivinghoe Beacon 87 miles northeast in Buckinghamshire.

**ASHBURY WALK**

Explore the classic chalk countryside with this walk just 10 miles west of Wantage, taking in the pretty Oxfordshire village of Ashbury, some wonderfully ancient sites and a chance to see a multitude of wildlife including hares, deer, skylarks, meadow pipits and corn buntings.

**Getting there:** By car – The walk starts in the car park on the Ridgeway a mile southeast of Ashbury where St Mary’s Church has a memorial to the Rev Thomas Stock, who created one of the first Sunday schools in England in 1777. From here and the remains of a Roman temple on the summit of Lowbury Hill. There are fine views

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8. Cross the Ridgeway and head down to Ashbury where St Mary’s Church has a memorial to the Rev Thomas Stock, who created one of the first Sunday schools in England in 1777. At the bottom of the hill turn left following the bank round. Bear right onto the tarmac path leading past the church. Cross the road (the Rose and Crown is only a short distance to the right) and bear right keeping Manor Farm to your left.
9. Cross the road onto the tarmac bridleway. Turn right onto the footpath just before the pond. Cross the road bearing slightly right and take the footpath past allotments on the left. Go over the stile, cross a field and over another stile.
10. Keeping the beach trees to your right, walk up through the middle of the coombe ahead that gradually swings left. At the top go left along the fence.
11. Turn right over the stile and at the Ridgeway turn right back to the car park where you started the walk.

**COMPTON WALK – THE LOWDOWN**

**Length:** 5.75 miles; **3 hours.**

**Terrain:** Mostly downland tracks with no stiles or gates. 

**Difficulty:** Moderately strenuous with no steep sections.

**Getting there:** By car – The walk starts in the centre of Compton.

**FURTHER INFORMATION**

For more information about these walks and others along the Ridgeway, visit www.nationaltrail.co.uk

**COMPTON SWAN**

The Compton Swan opens at 8am for coffee, and also has lunch and dinner menus. Accommodation is also available. Tel: 01635 579400 or visit www.comptonswan.co.uk. Compton village shop is open Monday to Saturday, and Sundays until 10.30am. The only toilets on the walk are in The Compton Swan.

**Ordinance Survey Explorer Map:** 174 Newbury and Wantage (1:50,000); 170 Abingdon, Wantage and Vale of White Horse (1:25,000).

**WHAT IS THE RIdgeway?**

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**FURTHER INFORMATION**

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Walks, wildlife and a wealth of history

West Berkshire

ABOVE AND BELOW THE SULHAM GAP – 6.5 MILES
(Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 159 Reading)
This pretty riverside walk starts at the attractive village of Pangbourne before passing through the glorious countryside, much of which is owned by the National Trust.

Above: Pangbourne

ST MARY BOURNE LOLLIPOP WALK – 2 MILES
(Ordnance Survey Explorer Maps 131 Romsey, Andover and Test Valley and 144 Basingstoke)
This lolliposhaped route starting at the village of St Mary Bourne, close to Andover, is associated with the North Wessex Downs AONB and is suitable for single-width buggies with one steep hill climb. The walk follows the ‘Walk to School Route’ and if you keep your eyes peeled, you’ll spot local children’s poems on the locally crafted green gates.

Above: St Mary Bourne – the picturesque view into the valley sides.

FURTHER INFORMATION
Leaflets of these walks are available from the Pang, Kennet and Lambourn Valley Projects at The Old Estate Office, Englefield Road, Theale, RG7 5DE or by calling 01189 305338.

Hampshire

CASTLE, MARESHE and HEATH – 4.75 MILES
(Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 158 Newbury and Hungerford)
Walk south from the historic Donnington Castle, which was the hub of two of the two famous battles of Newbury during the Civil War, past Donnington Grove, now a golf course, to the River Lambourn. As you cross and walk along the river, look out for trout, herons, cormorants and yellow flag iris, reed mace, willowherb and many other wetland species.

Above: Right: The picturesque view into the chalk scarp of Watership Down as seen from Beacom Hill.

Heading towards the riverside village of Bagworth, home to the famous Watermill Theatre, you’ll cross the picturesque Rack March – a Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BROW) Reserve – where you’ll be spoilt for choice for flowers from marsh marigold and meadow sweet to red clover and ragged robin. If you bring a magnifying glass you might just spot the rare 2mm Desmoulin’s snail, one of the nation’s most endangered species.

Above: Above: The Nuthanger – the chalk scarp of Watership Down as seen from Beacom Hill.

At the northernmost point of the walk lies Speenham Common, a lowland heath and a Site of Special Scientific Interest. The bogs and mines here are caused by the presence of a layer of impermeable London Clay. As well as purple bell heather and moor grass, the gorse provides nest sites for small birds. Roe deer, adders and newts are fellow residents. The route winds its way back towards the castle, past Castle Farm.

Well-deserved refreshment en route can be found at the friendly pub, the Blackbird in Bagworth, about half-way round the walk. It is open noon-2.30pm and 6pm-11pm Monday to Saturday, and noon-3pm Sundays. Call 01635 40638 or visit www.theblackbird.co.uk.

Bus services 6 and 9 provide a regular service from Newbury on Mondays to Saturdays (no Sunday or bank holiday services). Tel: 01635 567500. From the bus stop in Donnington, there are frequent Sunday and Bank Holiday services. Tel: 01635 40638 or visit www.theblackbird.co.uk.

Above: Above: Ramblers enjoying the lush, rolling downlands.

IT’S GOOD TO WALK
A study in 2009 revealed that people living in neighbourhoods more than a mile from a park had a 27 per cent greater chance of being overweight or obese. In response to this, the North Wessex Downs AONB is supporting Natural England’s campaign for a Natural Health Service. The scheme aims to increase the number of households within a five-minute walk of an area of green space of at least two hectares, and to enable every GP or community nurse to be able to signpost patients to an approved health walk or outdoor activity programme. To find your nearest ‘Walking the Way to Health’ walk, visit www.wfh.naturalengland.org.uk

If you’d like to make the most of the beautiful great outdoors in the North Wessex Downs, just for fun or for your health too, get involved in the new South East England campaign, Countryside 2010, which puts people in touch with a huge choice of activities and events that take place in the countryside, most of which are free. For more information, visit www.countrysides2010.org.uk
Horsing around on the heaths and hills

What better way to see the beautiful landscapes of the North Wessex Downs than high up on horseback?

Riders come from far and wide to enjoy the hills and valleys of the North Wessex Downs. Here, Janice Bridger, British Horse Society access and bridleways officer, explains the appeal and reveals her favourite routes...

WHAT BETTER WAY TO SEE THE BEAUTIFUL LANDSCAPES OF THE NORTH WESSEX DOWNS THAN HIGH UP ON HORSEBACK, RIDEING THE ANCIENT DROVERS’ WAYS TRODDEN SO MANY TIMES BEFORE BY THOUSANDS OF FEET AND HOVES?

Rather aptly, the North Wessex Downs AONB forms a horseshoe-shaped area of land. Old transport routes, such as the Kennet and Avon Canal and the old coaching road from London to Bristol, run east to west and are still in use today. But it is the myriad of other old routes that makes the North Wessex Downs ideal riding country.

What better way to see the beautiful landscapes of the North Wessex Downs than high up on horseback...

Experiencing on horseback the views from the ridges, the quiet river valleys and the secret network of old paths should definitely be enjoyed this summer.

The essence of the area is captured in the Three Downs Link riding route, which connects the well-known South Downs in south Hampshire with the North Hampshire Downs and the Berkshire Downs.

From this route, riders will find the quiet tracks and wildlife of the Tickell Forest. The forest is a remnant of the ancient woodland of the Berkshire Downs.

Leaflet of the Three Downs Link from the North Wessex Downs AONB

The Three Downs Link is a glorious way to enjoy the landscape. The route starts at the top of the Berkshire Downs, where the views are stunning. The route then winds its way through the wooded Kennet Valley with its little river and streams. To the west, the route climbs to Walbury Hill, the highest point in southeast England where on its summit you find the Iron Age Hill Fort of Walbury Camp. The site is a fascinating sight.

Although described as a walk, much of this route is open and well used by horse riders. Great improvements have been made to the Ridgeway and other tracks in recent years but more remains to be done elsewhere, so do make local inquiries before you set off.

FURTHER INFORMATION

• The ‘Three Downs Link’ leaflet and the ‘On Horseback’ books are available from the British Horse Society.

• For a guided ride in the North Wessex Downs AONB with a horse, visit www.rosheofhungerford.co.uk, www.pewseyvaleridingcentre.com, or www.visitwiltshire.co.uk

Celebrate the Kennet & Avon Canal

This year the Kennet and Avon Canal Trust celebrates the 200th anniversary of the opening of this impressive waterway.

LIFE ON THE canal is one of blissful relaxation, whether you’re enjoying it aboard a pretty painted narrow boat, riding a bike along the towpath, sitting in a train passing by or simply on two feet. The Kennet and Avon Canal slices its way through the middle of the North Wessex Downs and offers 87 miles of waterway, home to birds, water voles and other wildlife, flowers and trees, and an enticing selection of pubs, villages and tourist attractions.

The canal was built to provide an important transport link between the Thames and Bristol, but by the mid-20th century was facing closure. The Kennet and Avon Canal Trust was formed to campaign for restoration of the waterway. In 1990 the Kennet reopened the canal, and a significant Heritage Lottery Fund grant, as well as generous donations from the public, ensured its future for leisure and recreation.

Visitors to the Kennet and Avon Canal are in for a treat this year because it is the 200th anniversary of the canal’s construction, which was completed after 16 years in 1810. Special events abound culminating in a big birthday party on 28th December 2010, exactly 200 years to the day after the waterway’s opening.

FURTHER INFORMATION

• Crofton Beam Engines Marvell at the steam-operated beam engines in their original position within Crofton Pumping Station, six miles from the picturesque market town of Marlborough. Built in 1807 to provide water to the summit of the Kennet and Avon Canal, this Grade I listed building houses two magnificent engines, one of which is the oldest working beam engine in the world. Crofton Beam Engines are open from April throughout the summer, and in steam on bank holidays and most summer weekends, when they actually carry out the job they were built for. Enjoy a canal-side lunch from the cafe to make a great day out for all the family, and appreciate an important part of Britain’s industrial heritage.

T: 01672 870300 www.croftonbeamengines.org

• Rose of Hungerford From April to October, you can enjoy a couple of hours watching the countryside slip by on a public trip aboard the motor barge, Rose of Hungerford. Owned by the Kennet and Avon Canal Trust, this 55-foot vessel can take up to 50 passengers and can be chartered privately to provide a unique backdrop to a party.

T: 01635 255367 www.roseeofhungerford.co.uk

Cycling the canal

Watership Down, made famous by author Richard Adams. ‘Wiltshire on Horseback’ contains trails farther to the west, including the Wansdyke Path that takes you through wooded countryside to the north of Bucklebury Common, where places to park a horsebox.

Ride number 1046 explores the beautiful Pang Valley, where nightjars, tree pipits, woodlarks and tawny owls can be seen and heard.

GUIDES FOR RIDES
• ‘On Horseback’ guides The ‘Ridgeway Downs on Horseback’ leaflet from the RHS offers 16 rides on the chalk downland, where you will find bright blue chicory flowers alongside the tracks in high summer. Trails eight and 14 in ‘Hampshire on Horseback’ describe a ride along the top of the Hampshire Downs. The ‘Three Downs Link’ leaflet and the ‘On Horseback’ books are available from the British Horse Society. 

• For a guided ride in the North Wessex Downs AONB with a horse, visit www.rosheofhungerford.co.uk, www.pewseyvaleridingcentre.com, or www.visitwiltshire.co.uk

www.waterscape.com

MORE ON THE KENNET & AVON CANAL

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Out & about in The North Wessex Downs AONB

Key:

Ramble through grassy lanes on a Ridgeway walk near Compton page 7

New walks leaflets are now available for the Hamstead Marshall area page 15

Discover ancient hidden secrets on Geotrail page 4

For fresh local venison, visit The Pot Kiln, owned by celebrity chef Mike Robinson page 22

Experience the inspirational chalky landscape of Watership Down on The Nuthanger Walk page 9

Look out for strange-looking gates on a walk around St Mary Bourne page 9

Enjoy the views from Walbury Hill on horseback page 10

Celebrate the 200th anniversary of the Kennet & Avon canal at Caen Hill page 5

Avebury could soon be linked to Stonehenge on the new Great Stones Way walking route page 15

Pewsey Heritage Centre makes the perfect pitstop on a canalside cycle ride page 11

Key:

1400m
1000m
600m
200m
0

Avebury

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WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT TO HAVE A MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE NORTH WESSEX DOWNS AONB? The Management Plan is very effective in giving a long-term vision but it also allows us to state what we hope to achieve and also establish priorities so that we can give some kind of direction to our work.

WHAT ARE ITS MAIN AIMS? Within any landscape there is a huge variety of issues that we have to deal with, but the key things at the current time are sustainability development that doesn’t take account of the special nature of the landscape, the issues surrounding climate change and the need for the landscape to adapt in a way that doesn’t destroy its essential qualities, and how communities can thrive and develop in an area whilst seeking to preserve what’s special about that particular landscape.

IS THERE A CONFLICT BETWEEN PRESERVING THE AONB WHILST DEVELOPING IT? In my opinion, no. If people are prepared to take account of the area they live in when planning their development or their growth, the landscape is capable of absorbing good quality design. What is not capable of doing is absorbing things off the peg solutions.

HOW CAN PEOPLE GET INVOLVED IN HELPING TO ACHIEVE THOSEAIMS? Each business will have its own peculiar priorities and needs, and we hope that the development of the Management Plan has taken account of that variety of interests. The key thing for communities is to understand what it means to live in an area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, as individuals and as a community. Any community that is embarking on a parish planning scheme should stop and think about where the parish sits, and what that means in terms of how they can speak about the special qualities of the area and of the kind of actions they might include in their action plan.

CAN VISITORS TO THE AREA PLAY A PART TOO? Everyone has a role to play in some respect. We hope to achieve and to establish priorities so that there is a certain level of behaviour they have to contribute. This will ensure that the area is sustained and not spoilt by their activities.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE PART OF THE AONB? I’ve lived in Highclere for five years and my favourite part of the North Wessex Downs is the lower-lying area south of the River Kennet between Avebury and Marlborough. This is made up of very small fields, woodland, lots of tall hedges and narrow lanes. It is the loveliest but also the fact that it is very ancient. It is probably some of the oldest surviving components of the landscape that haven’t been impacted upon by 200 years of agriculture and some of that feel of what the landscape would have looked like 100 or 150 years ago.

FURTHER INFORMATION To find out more about the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan 2009-2014 go to www.northwessexdowns.org.uk

THE GREAT STONES WAY The popular Ridgeway National Trail could soon be extended all the way to Stonehenge World Heritage Site, as a result of the efforts of the Friends of the Ridgeway charity. The new 40-mile footpath would be called the Great Stones Way and would link the current southern end of the Ridgeway at Overton Hill near Avebury with Salisbury and Old Sarum. An SDF grant of £10,000 will contribute towards the £15,000 cost of a feasibility study to establish demand, local community support and set-up costs. The new route could be launched in March 2011.

If it goes ahead, the Great Stones Way is expected to raise the profile of the North Wessex Downs AONB and therefore increase visitor numbers, improve awareness of the landscape, encourage conservation, and provide new opportunities for businesses along the route such as farms, holiday accommodation, pubs and village shops.

HAMS T EAD MARSHALL WALKS From spring this year, new leaflets detailing walks around the 1,850-acre parish of Hamstead Marshall between Hungerford and Newbury are available, thanks to the SDF grant of £650 to help with the printing and promotional costs. The routes follow public footpaths and the canal towpath, and also take in farmland, woodland and parks, ensuring a good diversity of flora and fauna.

The leaflets also promote historic points of interest such as the 12th-century church, one of the routes incorporates The Farm Trail the conservation and education centre across Elm Farm, the home of the Organic Research Centre. The Farm Trail was established in 1993 but has recently been made more accessible, and information boards also funded by an SDF grant will soon be in place.

The new leaflets are available in the village hall, the church, and West Berkshire Visitor Information Office at The Wharf, Newbury amongst other locations.

In the past four years, more than £220,000 worth of SDF (Sustainable Development Fund) grants have been awarded by the AONB to 75 projects across the North Wessex Downs. Here are just a handful of schemes that have benefited recently from these grants.

WHAT IS AN SDF GRANT? SDF grants are small awards given with minimum bureaucracy to community groups, parish councils and businesses. The North Wessex Downs AONB has run the Sustainable Development Fund grant scheme since 2005. The programme encourages people to achieve more sustainable ways of living and working, while enhancing and conserving the local culture, wildlife and landscape. The money comes from Natural England.

HOW DO I APPLY? Visit www.northwessexdowns.org.uk, go to the Grants page and fill in the Sustainable Development Fund online application form, giving full details of your project, or call 01488 685440. For 2010-11 grants, projects must be completed before 31 March 2011.
Amid the troubles of the recession, there is a source of hope for rural communities and businesses in the North Wessex Downs.

**LEADER fund revitalises rural economy**

The North Wessex Downs LEADER Programme has drawn £2.3 million into the AONB and is investing in local food, renewable energy, sustainable tourism, community projects and business development. The fund is important because it offers opportunities for capital investment in business and community projects.

Wessex Biofuels Ltd is a new energy business spun off with help from a £50,000 LEADER grant, awarded to entrepreneurial foresters Martin Giles and David Hunt. The company will produce woodchip from locally-felled timber to fire boilers, offering opportunities for capital investment in forestry and renewable energy.

Amid the troubles of the recession, there is a source of hope for rural communities and businesses in the North Wessex Downs. A springboard which enabled us to pursue our strategic stockpiles of roundwood will be matched to the nearest stockpile, will then be matched to the nearest stockpile, and will be a source of income.

“People volunteering for our active group come to support the community, and we provide a local perspective on funding priorities for the North Wessex Downs AONB,” says Ian Ritchie, the group’s chairman. “People volunteering for our active group come to support the community, and we provide a local perspective on funding priorities for the North Wessex Downs AONB.”

**The LOWDOWN on the LEADER Fund**

- **What is LEADER?**
  - The LEADER programme is part of the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE), which is funded by the Government and the European Union. The fund supports the rural economy and can be granted to farmers, foresters, businesses, entrepreneurs, rural organisations and communities. Projects have to be in the North Wessex Downs AONB and must meet at least one of the T1 measures set out on the Grants page of www.northwessexdowns.org.uk.
  - How much could I get? Grants can be up to £50,000 or up to 50% of capital costs.
  - How long is the scheme open? Projects have to be delivered by 2013.

**BEER, WINE & CIDER**

- **A’BECKETT’S VINEYARD**
  - Contact: Paul or Lynn Langham
  - A’Beckett’s Farmhouse, High St, Littleton Parish, Devizes, SN10 4EN
  - T: 01386 816669
  - E: info@abecketts.co.uk
  - www.abecketts.co.uk
  - Award-winning vegan-friendly English wine, cider and apple juice.

- **APPLEFORD BREWERY**
  - Iron Bridge House, St Peters Court, Appleford-on-Thames, OX14 4HA
  - T: 01255 848055
  - E: sales@applefordbrewery.co.uk
  - www.applefordbrewery.co.uk
  - Traditional beer. Supplies the free trade and wholesalers throughout Oxfordshire and the Thames Valley and at Farmers’ Markets and farm shops.

- **ARKELL’S BREWERY**
  - Contact: James Arkell
  - Arkell’s Vineyards, Kennington, Swindon, SN2 7BJ
  - T: 01793 823026
  - E: arkells@arkells.com
  - www.arkells.com
  - Bees Organic Ale – award-winning ale, with New World wine as specialty. Victorian steam brewery.

- **BRIGHTWELL VINEYARD**
  - Contact: Mrs Carol Nielsen
  - Nash Court, Shillingford Road, Wallingford, OX10 8LJ
  - T: 01491 836586
  - E: winery@brightwines.co.uk
  - www.brightwines.co.uk
  - The largest vineyard in Chichester, producing award-winning English wines. Shop open for sales and tastings Fri-Sun., noon-4pm. Group vineyard tours.

- **BUTTS BREWERY**
  - Contact: Chris Butts
  - Northfield Farm, Great Shefford, near Hungerford RG17 7BY
  - T: 01488 684733
  - E: sales@buttsbrewery.com

- **LAMBOURN VALLEY CIDER COMPANY**
  - Contact: Ray Bailey
  - The Mill House, Great Shefford, Hungerford RG17 7ED
  - T: 01488 648441
  - E: ray@lambournvalleycider.co.uk
  - www.lambournvalleycider.co.uk
  - Old Berkshire perry from special local pears. Fermented in champagne bottles. Specialist outlets like Cobb’s Farm Shop, Hungerford.

- **MOLES BREWERY**
  - Contact: Roger Catte
  - S Marston Way, Bowerhill, Marlham SN1 6TJ
  - T: 01225 704734/708842
  - E: info@wbbrew.co.uk
  - www.wbbrew.com
  - Locally-malted Manot Otter malt, and cider, from local apples. Sells through pubs, clubs, restaurants and events. Products include Tap Bitter and Black Rat cider. Open 9am-5pm weekdays, 9am-noon Saturdays.

**RAMSBURY BREWERY**

- Contact: Darren Golding
  - Priory Farm, Axedale, Hungerford RG17 7JA
  - T: 01664 733367
  - E: dgdging@ramsburyestates.co.uk
  - www.ramsburybrewery.com
  - Uses Ramsbury home-grown spring barley and water from estate. Ramsbury Bitter and Haltc Highway Mon-Fri., 9am-4pm. Phone for appointment. Via website, local pubs, clubs, shops and festivals.

**WADWORTH & CO. LTD.**

- Contact: Jonathan Pollock
  - The Malt House, Great Shefford, Wallingford, OX10 8LJ
  - T: 01488 648534
  - E: jonathanpollock@wadworth.co.uk
  - www.wadworth.co.uk

**DOVES FARM FOODS**

- Contact: Clare Marriage
  - Salisbury Rd, Hungerford RG17 0RF
  - T: 01488 684880
  - E: mail@dovesfarm.co.uk
  - www.dovesfarm.co.uk
  - Specialist free miller and baker. Over 20 flours (including organic and wheat/gluten free), breakfast cereals and pasta. Bakery produces Fairtrade, organic and wheat/gluten free cookies, plus cereal bars and flapjacks.

**HUNGERFORD FOOD FESTIVAL**

- Tel: 01488 648534
  - www.hungerfordfoodfestival.co.uk
  - Celebrate all things delicious at the hugely popular Hungerford Food Festival, held annually each autumn. Last year’s event was attended by hundreds of foodies who were treated to cooking demonstrations from local chefs, wine and beer tasting, cookery competitions and numerous stalls offering all manner of indulgent local delights. This year there is a whole week of events planned from Saturday 25th September to Sunday 3rd October when the festival culminates in the day-long Hungerford Food Fair. Dates are correct at time of print but do check the website for confirmation.

**FURTHER INFORMATION**

Call Connie Woodall, LEADER Programme Manager on 01488 649046 or alternatively visit the Grants page of www.northwessexdowns.org.uk.

**Wessex Biofuels Ltd**

- 01488 645007
  - Frank Haighton Forestry – 01264 736297
  - Cosy Paws – 01488 648397
  - Woltertons Turks – 01488 578251

**Local Products Directory**

Many of the beautiful landscapes of the North Wessex Downs AONB have been created by farming. You can really eat the views by using this Local Products Directory to find freezies, bakeries, meat producers, preserves makers, shops, fruit and vegetable growers, thatchers and woodfuel providers – all within or very close to the North Wessex Downs.

**Micro-brewer of Dr. Healer’s Healer, winner at the Great British Beer Festival in 2009. Brewery tours. Shop: Mon-Fri 9am-4pm, Sat 10am-1pm.**

**BREAD, CAKES & FLOUR**

**DOVES FARM FOODS**

- Contact: Clare Marriage
  - Salisbury Rd, Hungerford RG17 0RF
  - T: 01488 684880
  - E: mail@dovesfarm.co.uk
  - www.dovesfarm.co.uk
  - Specialist free miller and baker. Over 20 flours (including organic and wheat/gluten free), breakfast cereals and pasta. Bakery produces Fairtrade, organic and wheat/gluten free cookies, plus cereal bars and flapjacks.
If you would like a FREE listing in our next Local Products Directory call 01488 685449 or email info@northwessexdowns.org.uk
Celebrity chef Mike Robinson is a TV star and published author, but cooking fresh, local food in his pub near Frilsham is where his true heart lies.

Wild about food

For the last decade, Mike Robinson has been splashed across our screens dishing up delectable delights on numerous cookery programmes, from BBC’s Saturday Kitchen to UKTV Food’s Great Food Live. But in 2005, he decided to give television a back seat and put all his energy into The Pot Kiln, a pub near Frilsham in west Berkshire which he had just bought. For Mike this country pub, part of a former brick works, was so much more than just a business venture. “I grew up in Buckingham just over the hill, and I was at school in Brockhurst and Bradfield, so this is my manor!” laughs Mike. “And I’ve been frequenting The Pot Kiln since I was in a pram! So the pub is definitely my baby.”

Mike’s TV career stepped up a gear this spring when he took the reins of ITV’s Countrywise programme as a presenter in March. But no matter how big he becomes, Mike’s adamant about one thing… “I’ll never leave this area. It’s perfect. It’s got everything: lovely countryside, deer stalking, and Bradfield, so this is my manor!” laughs Mike. “And I’ve been frequenting The Pot Kiln since I was in a pram! So the pub is definitely my baby.”

CELEBRITY PERKS

Mike admits that being involved in television certainly has its perks, not least that it’s good for business, something worth a great deal when your business is a pub in the middle of a large field with very little passing trade. And he’s happy with the public’s perception of him. “People know me for the wild food, and I’ve got a real sense of responsibility and interest in the countryside, so I feel pretty happy about that,” he says. “I’m not hugely well known, which suits me down to the ground, so I still have some privacy. All in all I’m just happy with my life in the countryside: cooking this food, eating it, making people happy and seeing the countryside.”

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Find out more

VISITOR ATTRACTIONS
• Ashdown House and other National Trust properties www.nationaltrust.org.uk
• Avebury and other English Heritage sites www.english-heritage.org.uk
• Crofton Beam Engines www.croftonbeamengines.org
• Highclere Castle www.highclerecastle.co.uk
• Kennet & Avon Canal www.katrust.org
• Lambourn Open Day www.lambourn.info
• Living Rainforest www.livingrainforest.org
• Pewsey Heritage Centre www.pewsey-heritage-centre.org.uk
• Project Timescape www.northmoortrust.co.uk
• Museum of the Iron Age www.hants.gov/museum-of-the-ironage
• Savernake Forest www.savernakeestate.co.uk
• Vale and Downland Museum, Wantage www.wantage.com/museum
• West Berkshire Museum, Newbury www.westberks.gov.uk
• Wiltshire Heritage Museum, Devizes www.wiltshireheritage.org.uk

TRANSPORT LINKS
• Bus and train information www.traveline.org.uk 0871 200 2233
• Cycle routes www.sustrans.org.uk
• First Great Western railway services www.fgw.co.uk
• Kennet & Avon Canal for boat users, cyclists and walkers www.visittkanda.com

WALKING LINKS
• Countryside 2010 – a breath of fresh air www.countryside2010.org.uk
• Friends of the Ridgeway www.ridgewayfriends.org.uk
• Hamstead Marshall Walks www.hamsteadmarshall.net
• Hampshire Walks www.hants.gov.uk/walking
• National Trails: Ridgeway and Thames Path www.nationaltrail.co.uk

WILDLIFE TRUSTS
• Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) www.bbown.org.uk
• Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust www.hwt.org.uk
• Wiltshire Wildlife Trust www.wiltshirewildlife.org

www.northwessexdowns.org.uk