



# Annual Report of the South Downs Access Forum 2005

Over the last year considerable effort has been put into making the South Downs more accessible to the general public. Hundreds of gates, stiles, information panels and signs have been installed in order to enhance the open access and rights of way experience. A wardening scheme has also been established. These advances have meant that the general public is able to get much 'closer' to the South Downs landscape than ever before. This hasn't been simple to achieve as the South Downs is a large, diverse landscape, with highly fragmented access land and a multitude of different needs and wants. Finding the right balance can be difficult.

The South Downs Access Forum has helped find this balance and continued to be a considerable driving force in ensuring the responsible opening up the countryside to both local and visitor populations. Members of the Forum pool their expertise and knowledge to provide sound, impartial advice on all aspects of access and recreation. A second year of continuous hard work and dedication by Forum members has helped make the quality of access to the South Downs better than ever before.

## Why a South Downs Access Forum?

The Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000 saw the requirement of Access Authorities (local highway authorities) to establish independent Local Access Forums. The role of such forums is to advise on strategic access and recreational issues. Local Access Forums were set up in Brighton & Hove, East Sussex, Hampshire and West Sussex. As a first of its kind in England, it was also decided that a sub forum, named the South Downs Access Forum, be set up to advise purely on matters regarding the Sussex Downs and East Hampshire AONBs. The work of the Forum helps create a consistent, South Downs wide approach to access and recreation.



## Who are the Forum?

The Forum is made up of some 20 individuals representing landowners/managers, recreational users and those with more specialised interests (such as conservation and sport). This creates a balanced representation of the different groups that live, work and play in the South Downs. Meetings are held five times a year, generally at the South Downs Joint Committee's headquarters in Ford, Arundel.



## How can you be a part of it?

The South Downs Access Forum is currently looking for new members, especially those with special interests in disabled access, ethnic minority groups, sport, or sustainable transport. If you are interested in this and would like to know more please fill in the attached form or contact the Forum Officer (see overleaf for details).

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SOUTH DOWNS ACCESS FORUM  
c/o THE SOUTH DOWNS JOINT COMMITTEE  
VICTORIAN BARN  
FORD LANE  
FORD  
ARUNDEL  
WEST SUSSEX  
BN18 0EF

**Achievements in 2005**

**Rights of Way Improvement Plans**



All the local authorities across the South Downs are in the process of producing Rights of Way Improvement Plans (RoWIPs). The main aim of these plans is to ensure that

today's rights of way network and other access opportunities are relevant to the needs of the 21st century user.

Through geographically specific working groups, the South Downs Access Forum has provided advice on RoWIPs for all 4 relevant highway authorities. This has included marking up maps with proposed modifications and additions to the rights of way network based on a set of pre-agreed criteria. It is this work which has helped to ensure a consistent approach to RoWIPs across the South Downs. Key aims of this work has included:

- being aspirational.
- concentrating on securing long term improvements to the rights of way network.
- looking at access to the South Downs in broader terms including the use of licensed and permissive paths.
- ensuring cross boundary co-ordination and a consistent approach between neighbouring authorities.

**Open Access**

By the end of March over a thousand items of infrastructure had been installed on the 322 Open Access sites across the AONBs, many of these were based on the Forum's recommendations. Since then the Forum has continued to develop Open Access land by:



- pressing Local Authorities to take action where landowners have been unwilling to open up areas of access land.
- lobbying for the location of open access infrastructure to be made publicly available. For example by placing the information on both the Countryside Agency's and local authorities' web based maps.

Map section above, reproduced from the Ordnance Survey 1:25 000 map with the permission of the Controller Stationery Office © Crown Copyright 2005 Licence No. LA076902



Areas now designated as Open Access land are marked with this symbol. These new sites are open to walkers right across the South Downs. To find out where the Open Access land in your neighbourhood is, try the new Explorer maps or visit [www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk](http://www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk)

South Downs Access Forum Partners  
 Brighton and Hove City Council, Countryside Agency,  
 East Hampshire AONB, East Sussex County Council,  
 Hampshire County Council, Sussex Downs AONB,  
 West Sussex County Council

- encouraging Parish Councils to raise public awareness of local Open Access land.
- assisting with the prioritisation of rights of way improvements to and between areas of Open Access land.



**Other Areas of Work**

The Forum has not just focused its sights on RoWIPs and Open Access land, it has also:

- begun to work for the inclusion of non-CRoW access land on maps, so that ALL land accessible to the public can be found in one easy place.
- commented on appropriate furniture and signpost guidelines across the South Downs.
- discussed motorised vehicular use across the South Downs, voting that protecting tranquillity was more important than providing for the motorised vehicle use.
- liaised with Sport England regarding recreation in the countryside.
- advised how the Arun Valley Community Rail Partnership should promote access / recreational developments along the railway corridor.
- responded to a number of access related consultations from the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs and the Countryside Agency.
- investigated issues relating to access to water.



**How can you find out more?**

The Forum has a website where you can view all the agendas and minutes of the meetings and find out more about its work and members this can be viewed at [www.southdowns.com](http://www.southdowns.com) Or you can contact James Ort, the Forum Officer, by email at [jort@southdowns-aonb.gov.uk](mailto:jort@southdowns-aonb.gov.uk) or by writing to him at the South Downs Joint Committee, Victorian Barn, Ford Lane, Ford BN18 0EF.



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**Title:** Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss/Dr/Prof

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Home address :**  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Home telephone number**  
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**Email Address**  
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**Interests:**

(Please tick where appropriate)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Walking                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Sustainable Transport                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cycling                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Equestrian<br>(indicate riding or driving) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Motorised vehicle use                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Disabled Access                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ethnic Minority Groups                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Tourism                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Land ownership (incl. tenants)               | <input type="checkbox"/> Rural business                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Land management<br>(incl. councils, charity) | <input type="checkbox"/> Sport                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)                     |

