



Over, Under and Across the Surrey Hills

Surrey has often been at the forefront of infrastructure development

Long before the administrative County of Surrey was formed, its inhabitants were improving their means of transport across the area. The Romans created one of their first major roads, known as Stane Street, in the early years of their occupation connecting Chichester with London. This was an interesting demonstration of the engineering principles that the Romans used when building roads. A straight-line alignment from London Bridge to Chichester would have required steep crossings of the North Downs, Greensand Ridge and South Downs. The road was therefore designed to exploit a natural gap in the North Downs cut by the River Mole and to pass to the east of the high ground of Leith Hill, before following flatter land in the River Arun valley to Pulborough. The modern A3 and then the A24 roads follows this route.



Class 47 locomotive at St Catherine's, Guildford.
Photo: G Burch.

One of the country's first canal systems, the Wey Navigation opened in 1653. While the navigation today is a place of tranquillity and recreation, it was once a vital transport route for Surrey merchants taking cargo to and from the River Thames. Crews would be anxious not to miss London tides, working quickly to unload cargoes of grain, timber, coal and even gunpowder from the Chilworth mills.

At the start of the 19th Century on good roads, stagecoaches could average 7.5 mph; by the 1830s the first railways dramatically increased this to 20 mph and by the 1850s railways transported goods and people at an incredible 50 mph. Read about the history of the North Downs Line on Page 3.

To accommodate new forms of transport British engineers had to devise ways of going over or under inconvenient obstacles and in this issue of Surrey Hills Views we investigate Britain's and possibly Europe's first purpose-built road tunnel (page 6).

One of the greatest changes has occurred over the last 100 years with the introduction of the motor car. The building of the M25 that now dissects the Surrey Hills Natural Landscape towards the eastern end and the constant expansion of the A3, which is now dual or triple carriageway for most of its



Raft race on the Wey

length, are massive feats of engineering. The environmental impacts of these schemes are huge and all road building excites controversy, although both roads at least carry traffic along narrow corridors that ensure the bulk of the Surrey Hills remain a valued haven.

However, there are now projects that are actually improving the situation. In our centre spread we look at the impact of the Hindhead Tunnel and the major benefits that this has had on our landscape and nature recovery.

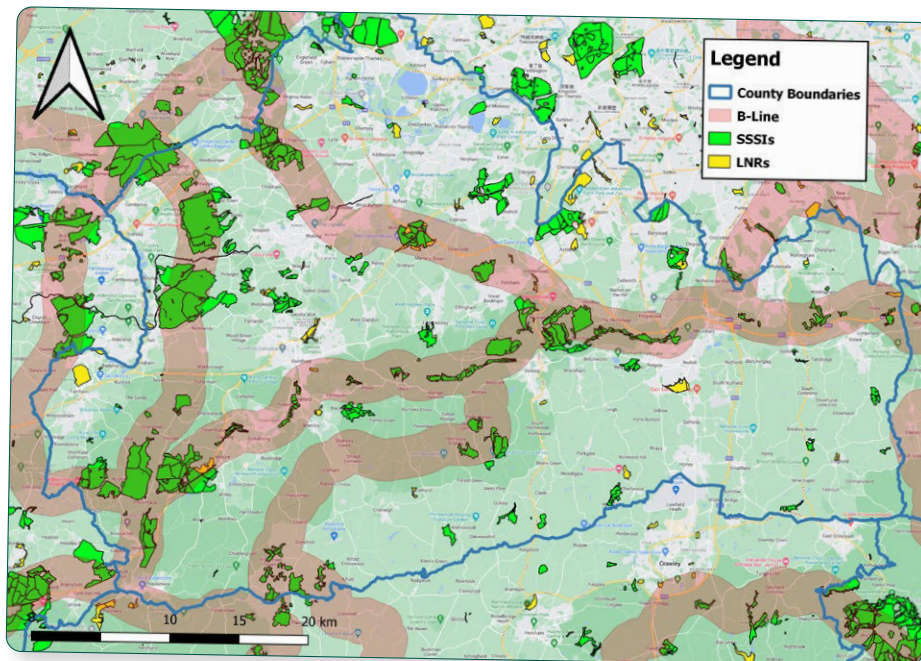
There is a new dimension in the 21st Century and that is Space. Satellites made here in Surrey orbit above the Surrey Hills and can give us high-definition images of local habitats. In our Chairman's Views on Page 2, read about the ground-breaking Space4Nature project that Society volunteers will be able to support in the near future.



Chairman's Views Space Age Conservation

A couple of weeks ago I attended an exciting meeting with representatives from Surrey Wildlife Trust (SWT) and Bug-Life to discuss 'Space4Nature'. This Surrey-based project to boost biodiversity through Artificial Intelligence (AI) and space technology has won £1.25m of funding, thanks to the players of People's Postcode Lottery, and opens the door to hundreds of nature enthusiasts who want to get involved.

SWT and the University of Surrey are working in partnership with Buglife across four test sites. The University will use very high-resolution images from space satellites and drones and combine them with AI capabilities to map diverse habitats in Surrey. The sophisticated technology means the team can zoom in to less than 0.5m2 to identify habitats. It can spot where dangers and threats to wildlife species lie, and find



Surrey's B-Lines. Photo: Buglife.

solutions which help protect nature, but help is needed to create data for the computer-based learning systems. SWT and Buglife will soon recruit and train 1,500 volunteers in habitat, plant and insect identification. The data collected by these citizen scientists will enable highly detailed monitoring of biodiversity potential and ensure the best decisions can be made to restore wildlife.

A key aim will be to reconnect islands of habitat so that species do not become isolated. With human-dominated landscapes often bereft of insect-friendly food and refuge, this habitat fragmentation is a leading driver behind our insects' tragic declines, which inevitably leads to loss of biodiversity further up the food chain. 'B-Lines', developed by Buglife, is the world's largest and most joined-up habitat connectivity project. Composed of thousands of miles, 'B-Lines' are 3km wide, envisaged 'insect superhighways'. Mapped with expert and local knowledge, 'B-Lines' link the UK's best remaining wildflower-rich habitats. It is hoped to create between 30 and 60 hectares of new pollinator rich habitat in Surrey.

The Society is keen to support 'Space4Nature' and 'B-Lines' by organising and encouraging volunteers to help with data collection. We are already working on several conservation projects across the Surrey Hills and our future efforts will be informed by the research that emerges, working with landowners and other conservation partners to produce a joined-up effort to arrest loss of biodiversity.

Heather Aitken Our new Events Committee member

My early years were on a small farm amongst hens, horses, pigs, geese, sheep and always dogs, I am a New Forest Heather!

Life has been full of change, and as my three sons know my motto is "Let's go!"

Always being an avid music lover, one of my first jobs was as a Disc Jockey. Starting at the Penthouse Club in Copenhagen, I DJ'd in Amsterdam, Munich, Frankfurt, and Raffles in the Kings Road London. Of course, I met many of the music stars of the time – many of whom are still performing, it was a magical time but never intended to last for ever.

Returning to London, I passed the Wine Spirit and Education Trust exams. With my husband's help, I started The Village Delicatessen in Shepherd's Bush. It was a gamble, but it paid off because supermarkets

had not yet cottoned onto deli counters, and we were near the BBC where all those involved in the TV industry would visit. Our favourite regular was Billy Connolly who was always good natured and made us laugh. The first Christmas after opening people were queuing in the street. Quite carried away with our success, we opened a whole chain and ended up with a dozen shops, cafes and bars with me working all hours whilst juggling two small children.

In the late 1980's we decided that life was too short to waste just working so we sold the business and moved abroad to the last place we had been on holiday... Portugal, for maybe two years. Twenty years later I left Portugal.

Back in England in 2008, I ended up in Bramley – a new start, lovely new friends locally and interests to pursue. My appreciation of wine



Heather Aitken

led me to join "Red White & Rose" organising events and writing a regular wine and leisure page for The Surrey Advertiser.

To live within the beautiful Surrey Hills is indeed a special privilege. The countryside has always been my source of peace and pleasure, which I enjoy daily with friends and of course with my dog. I am happy to be part of The Surrey Hills Society in preserving and promoting this beautiful part of the country that I now call my forever home.

Shere Heath. Photo: G Burch.



The North Downs Line



Gomshall and Shere Station



Rail to Ramble Launch July 2021



Steam Train near Shere

The North Downs Line is our local railway running alongside the southern slope of the Downs between Redhill and Guildford via Reigate and Dorking. The route also takes in Betchworth, Gomshall, Chilworth and Shalford. This is great for those wanting to undertake linear walks such as the SHS walks series 'Rail To Ramble'. Frustratingly, the service has only a small number of stopping trains (although at least there are pubs close to some of the stations where one can rest awhile!).

But this line could have been so much more. To appreciate this, one needs to go back to its origin. This was amongst the earliest routes in Surrey having been opened in 1849 by the Reading, Guildford and Reigate Company. Their objective was to "secure through traffic passing between the West, North and Midlands and the Channel Ports avoiding the congestion of London and thus saving time, distance and expense". After three years it was bought by the South Eastern Railway whose Chairman also envisaged it as an

invaluable link between the Great Western Railway and the south-east coastal ports.

The line could have assumed even greater importance when, in 1859, a line between Guildford and Portsmouth (via Godalming) was completed. A link between Godalming and Shalford was given approval and work started on a curve to join the lines. A wooden bridge was built over the Wey and a building constructed for a station at Peasmarsh. Had this project come to fruition, Shalford could have become an important railway junction.

Each station from Guildford to Reigate had extensive sidings and supported local industries such as the quarry at Betchworth. Many of the historic photos show goods trains working the line and the large area now given over to the Marquis caravan sales yard at Gomshall gives an indication of the scale of activities.

All of the stations between Shalford and Betchworth inclusive, were recommended for closure in the 1963 Reshaping of British

Railways report. The report recommended that the North Downs Line should be re-developed as a heavily worked, rail-freight only, trunk route linking a future Channel Tunnel to Reading and beyond. The line survived but with a very slimmed down infrastructure and much of the station architecture was demolished – only Chilworth and Betchworth still have original station houses, the rest now being unmanned stops.

Steam trains were replaced by diesel units at the beginning of 1965. Periodically, there have been proposals for electrification but these have never come to fruition.

Going full circle, the Network Rail 2008 Strategic Business Plan recommended that an enhancement project for the line should be pursued to enable freight traffic from the Channel Tunnel to use the line! This is still a line with potential and the Surrey Hills Society works closely with the Southeast Communities Rail Partnership to promote the local leisure opportunities which it supports.

Tranforming the Devil's Punchbowl

Many of our readers will remember the interminable queues and delays that used to be created at the infamous Hindhead crossroads where the A3 cut through the village and then curved around the Devils Punchbowl. All this changed in 2011 when the Hindhead Tunnel opened and made the route from Portsmouth to London safer, quicker and shorter, cutting journey times by up to 24 minutes. It also addressed serious air quality issues in Hindhead itself, which was made an Air Quality Management Area in 2004 due to the poor air quality created by queuing traffic along the old A3.



Looking South from Xylem Inspiring View



Hindhead tunnel. Photo: Martinvl, CC BY-SA 3.0.



Aerial view of Devil's Pnchbowl showing old A3.
Photo: Highways Agency, CC BY 2.0



View of the Devil's Punchbowl from the Sailor's Stone

The Hindhead Tunnel Scheme was by far the largest capital investment in restoring nature, connectivity and tranquillity in the Surrey Hills since it was designated in 1958. It was also perhaps the largest single civil engineering investment in the country's 44 National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (National Landscapes). Costing £370 million, it is the longest non-estuarial road tunnel in the country measuring 1.2 miles (1.85 kms) and reaching its greatest depth of 65 metres beneath Gibbet Hill.

Rob Fairbanks, Director of the Surrey Hills National Landscape says:

"The Hindhead Tunnel has been fantastic in terms of nature and people, and it's wonderful to see how, 11 years after the tunnel was built, nature has been fully restored to the area for the first time in nearly 200 years."

Hindhead Common and the Devil's Punch Bowl, which are within the Surrey Hills

National Landscape and managed by the National Trust, have been united to form 1000 acres of spectacular open space. Much of the area is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a Special Preservation Area (SPA).

Although one can still see the line taken by the old A3, most visitors would not even realise that a major road once ploughed through the landscape. The higher ground of the Punch Bowl's magnificent horseshoe-shaped valley is heathland. Formed by erosion from a series of springs, which now feed Smallbrook stream, it is the largest spring-sapped valley in Europe.

Hindhead Common is dominated by Gibbet Hill – at 892 feet it affords spectacular views North, East and South. The SSSI is one of the highest points in Southern England. As a result the relatively cool, humid climate of this 'lowland' heathland contains species normally associated with more upland sites

such as Bilberry, and trees festooned with lichens and mosses.

The tunnel has enabled one of the largest heathland restoration projects in Southern England. The fragile and endangered historic heathland habitat has been managed to enable the return of rare and diverse breeding birds such as Woodlark and Nightjar. The mosaic of habitats includes upland and lowland heath, bog, streams, ancient woodland, and free draining sandy soil, making it a challenge to manage. Heather mowing, the introduction of woodlark nesting areas, grazing and scrub management has all contributed to its success for nature. The nationally scarce Heath Tiger Beetle has been sighted, and conditions are now favourable for the return of the Silver-studded Blue Butterfly. The habitat is also ideal for endangered birds such as the Dartford Warbler, Nightjar and Woodlark as well as many more besides.

This restoration of the landscape within the Surrey Hills National Landscape has created a haven for visitors choosing to spend time exploring the stunning heathland and views. New paths created by the National Trust including an easy access path for those with disabilities enable visitors to enjoy the tranquillity of the site while avoiding wildlife disturbance on sensitive heathland areas.

The Hindhead Tunnel really is a feat of human engineering that has delivered for our environment.



Dartford Warbler.
Photo: Dean Eades, CC BY-SA 4.0.



Silver-studded Blue.
Photo: Gailhampshire CC BY 2.0.



Green Tiger Beetle.
Photo: Orangeaurochs CC BY 2.0

Reigate Tunnel's 200th Anniversary

This year marks the 200th anniversary of a well known landmark in the Surrey Hills. In 1823 Reigate Tunnel was opened. This 50 metre stretch of brick vaulted roadway leading north/south through the centre of the town looks rather ordinary now. It is a familiar short cut for pedestrians, school children and cyclists, who are likely to be unaware of its genuine status as a national landmark. Yes, national.

Reigate Tunnel is recognised by civil engineers as being the first purpose-built road tunnel in Britain and possibly the first fully engineered road tunnel in the world.



Reigate Tunnel

Earl Summers instructed engineer William Constable (from Horley) to construct it to link the top and bottom of the town by tunnelling underneath his property, on which lies the remains of the old Reigate Castle. It was done for two very practical reasons. Firstly, to ease the horse drawn journey around the steep sides of the town by burrowing straight through the central hill. Secondly, Earl Summers created a profitable section of toll road for himself. It cost a ha'penny for a horse and up to sixpence for a coach.

Rumours that the tunnel was built to enable the Prince Regent to get to and from Brighton to enjoy his Pavilion (built 1787) are inaccurate by some 36 years. Reigate Tunnel had to be designed from scratch in a method that would support the weight of the hill above. Constable would have used canal tunnels as a guide to the construction. The fact that it has survived 200 years of constant use means he knew what he was doing. Being a significant improvement to the flow of traffic between London and Brighton it is as significant as the Dartford Crossings are today.

I'm old enough to recall driving through the tunnel in our Triumph Herald and it was part of the main London to Brighton route until the early 1970's when the one-way system was brought in. Walking through it today leaves you quite flabbergasted that two-way traffic could ever have been allowed to squeeze



HM Queen's Platinum Jubilee



Inside the tunnel

through such a small space. The approach from the north is a rough dug culvert into the sandstone and the southbound exit created the Tunnel Vaults on the east side and the stores of the Market Tavern on the west.

This July Reigate will be celebrating this little known 'first' with a pageant of historic transport passing through the tunnel on the morning of 9 July. You can find out more here: [\(link\)](#)

Martin Wilkie

New artwork launched!

Inspiring Views is a project that restores hidden viewpoints across the Surrey Hills, improving access and celebrating these views through innovative, sculptural seating.

Surrey Hills Arts have worked with the Surrey Hills Society on a programme of walks and a hedge planting project for their latest Inspiring Views commission, 'Coccolith'. The location of this wonderful panoramic view is at Clarks Lane in Tatsfield directly on the North Downs Way National Trail. They commissioned INSTAR, artist duo Trish Evans and Nick Humphries,

to create an innovative sculptural seat from which to rest on a journey.

Inspired by the very creatures that, 65 million years ago, formed this chalk landscape, 'Coccolith' references this in its materials and imagery. The piece has been built using traditional dry-stone wall techniques, by specialist Jason Hoffman, using a hand-picked selection of local ironstone rock excavated from the Titsey Estate along with 'clunch' chalk. The top of this simple circular structure is planted with native wildflowers that will naturally flourish, attracting and nourishing wildlife and visitors alike.

A set of five cantilever stone seats within the structure provide the perfect spot to take the weight off and absorb the valley. The seats are engraved with the words BUILT UPON TIME AND TIDE reflecting the evolution of the

chalk landscape. Coccolith is partially set into the gentle slope of the chalk hill and offers a wonderful sense of tranquility.

INSTAR delivered workshops with local young people where they learned about the formulation of the chalkland and created mono prints on the theme. These young people from Oxted School are returning this year to experience the completed artwork in situ.

The Surrey Choices Growth Team of adults with learning disabilities proved a great help in digging through the flint to create the foundations for the piece. They have also planted a 60 metre native hawthorn hedgerow. This was organised by the Society and funded by the Farming in Protected Landscapes Fund.

'Coccolith' was co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund. It is supported by Surrey Hills Arts, Titsey Estate and the North Downs Way National Trail.



Coccolith



Surrey Hills Partnership members at Coccolith opening

SHS to the rescue!

What do you do if you are responsible for a large, complex project with a fixed delivery date and your professional consultant tells you that she is unlikely to complete in time? Well, if you are the North Downs Way (NDW) trail manager, you call the President of SHS.

The task? To walk the NDW from Farnham to a point above Oxted making detailed walk notes so that the route can eventually appear on the National Trails website. (Doing this would then enable the consultant to focus on the Kent stretch). But it was more than this – every stile, step and gateway needed to have an accurate grid reference and what3words address. This is to help with the accurate mapping of the route and also provide references for walkers.

Why us? Well, Chris Howard, with SHS Vice-President (Ken Bare), have walked this route on numerous occasions and, indeed, are NDW Ambassadors.

The challenges? Numerous! It was October before SHS were even asked to do the work. The deadline was January and – as many walkers have discovered – the chalk surfaces become sticky and quite treacherous during wet weather. Making all the notes etc. meant that walking speed was low (averaging 3km / hour) and the days were getting shorter. Photos of scenery or points of interest were

required and, of course, the weather and seasons make this harder in winter.

The result? The walks were completed, written up and delivered in mid-January – ahead of deadline! In addition, the fee for doing the work was donated by Chris and Ken to SHS thus supporting its valuable work in the Surrey Hills.



The North Downs Way approaching Inglis Memorial

Public Consultation Surrey Hills AONB Boundary Review

On 7th March 2023 Natural England is expected to commence a statutory consultation on its draft proposals to extend the Surrey Hills National Landscape (AONB). Only Natural England with the Secretary of State's approval can vary the designated boundary. This public consultation will run for 14 weeks until 13 June.

An early engagement took place with the public and various bodies at the end of 2021 and January 2022 which has never been done before. With this project Natural England has trialled a much more collaborative approach by comparison with previous AONB and National Park designations and boundary reviews.

The draft proposals are for the Surrey Hills National Landscape to be about a quarter larger. The additional areas include, but not exclusively, many parts of the Area of Great Landscape Value, being the local landscape planning designation. There are no proposals to de-designate any part of the existing AONB.

Widespread publicity is being planned to include local press, radio and television. In addition to comprehensive information on the web, there are to be webinars and public drop ins across the Surrey Hills. Once the consultation is launched a formal response to it can be made by completing the on-line response form at <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/ne-landscape-heritage-and-geodiversity-team/surrey-hills-boundary-variation>. If you would like to respond in paper form please contact: Meg Johannesson on 07920 183 313 or by email to meg.johannesson@naturalengland.org.uk

Much local interest is anticipated. Some of the public may be disappointed because the proposals have or have not included an area in the AONB extension. In making any comments it will be important to refer to documents supporting the consultation, which will contain the guidance on assessing natural beauty for designation as AONB along with the detailed technical assessments undertaken by Natural England.

The next stage is for Natural England to evaluate the consultation responses. This could result in a revision of the proposals and a further consultation on any new areas to be included. This stage is expected to take until the end of the year, following which Natural England will submit their proposed boundary to the Secretary of State. They may if so minded, call a Public Inquiry to assist in their decision-making in relation to whether the designation should be confirmed or not, or amended. If that were to happen it would considerably delay the designation of the new boundary. It would be helpful for anyone supporting the proposals to make their views known to Natural England. Further, any concerns for a locally different boundary might best be expressed as tactful suggestions for change together with support for the need and overall principle of the review. We may not get everything everyone wants but the main thing is to make certain that the review is not kicked into the long grass.

Events programme February to May 2023

Below is a brief list of planned events we are running. There is much more detail on our website and a link to a booking form which needs to be filled in whether an event is free or has a cost. Additional events may be added to the website. There is also information on the website about other events of interest in the Surrey Hills.

| DATE | EVENT DETAIL |
|------------------|---|
| Thursday 9 March | Circle 8 Films Enjoy tea and two short films "Tunnel under Hindhead" and "The Life and Times of Lewis Carroll" |
| Tuesday 21 March | A Day in Bletchingley Informative day run by the Bletchingley Conservation and Historical Society |
| Sunday 2 April | Explore Epsom A free walk around this historical Surrey town. |
| Tuesday 4 April | Hedgehogs Don't Live in the City Easter Holiday Wildlife workshop for children with author Lucy Reynold (morning and afternoon sessions) at Newlands Corner |
| Sunday 7 May | Explore Staffhurst Woods Walk through these woods famous for their bluebell displays. |
| Tuesday 16 May | Chairman's Day Visit St Mary's Church West Horsley and West Horsley Place followed by lunch at the Duke of Wellington |
| Saturday 20 May | Visit to Ranmore Church This is a fascinating church on the North Downs Way designed by George Gilbert Scott. |

PLEASE VISIT www.surreyhillssociety.org OR EMAIL: info@surreyhillssociety.org
OR PHONE: 07539 9494302 and leave a message, someone will get back to you

 Instagram  Twitter and  Facebook.

Update from Christa, our Project Volunteer Coordinator Tree Popping across the Surrey Hills

During this winter season, the Society has been involved in chalk grassland and heathland restoration in the Surrey Hills. Last year, the Society was pleased to receive a Farming in Protected Landscapes Grant from Defra, which was used to purchase six tree poppers. These bespoke tools are used to lever inappropriate tree species, such as hawthorn and silver birch, out of the ground by the root. The idea is that this stops the trees from growing back and reduces the need for ongoing management, as well as the need for herbicides.

We have been using our poppers, mainly at two sites, Longdown and Banstead Heath. Longdown is an extensive area of chalk grassland, owned by the Hampton Estate near Puttenham. Working closely with the Estate, the Society has helped organise several

volunteer groups to come and 'pop' hawthorn, to restore the site to botanically rich chalk grassland. So far, groups have included the Surrey Choices Growth Team, Halow, Defra (Farming in Protected Landscapes Team) and Butterfly Conservation.

At Banstead Heath, we have been working in partnership with Banstead Commons Conservators to open up heathland glades and remove silver birch. We have had very successful sessions with Leatherhead Youth Project and a refugee group, who were both incredibly enthusiastic and determined to pop the whole allocated area. We were even treated to a rare sighting of an adder basking under a sheet of tin.

Over the next couple of months, we will be continuing to plant native hedgerow in partnership with Surrey Hills farmers and

landowners. We will also be engaging with several wildlife surveys, as well as working with a local children's author to facilitate and assist with a series of Hedgehog Workshops at various sites across the Surrey Hills.



Adder on Banstead Heath. Photo: Lucy Shea.