

Staff Exchange Report

10th June 2019 Kent, UK

“Arts & Culture projects along the North Downs Way National Trail”

Overview: Site visits to Arts & Culture projects along the North Downs Way National Trail, meeting project managers and understanding how these projects are delivered and the outcomes.

Learning points: How different installations and arts activities can provide practical infrastructure and interpretation to trails and create interest to wider audiences through storytelling and engagement activities.

Surrey Hills

First stop of the day was at Farnham Heath in the Surrey Hills. Ali Clarke, Programme Manager of Surrey Hills Arts, greeted us. It was a rainy day, so Ali provided us with some shelter while telling us about the Surrey Hills Arts Programme.

The Surrey Hills Arts Programme aims to:

- Inspire new audiences and raise Surrey’s profile and sense of place through innovative, ambitious public art
- Develop sustainable, inclusive arts projects for Surrey communities
- Reconnect people with their local protected landscapes and boost tourism
- Promote the rich artistic and cultural heritage of the Surrey Hills within a contemporary context
- Encourage outdoor activity for all ages and abilities including those with mental health difficulties and disabilities
- Work in partnership with other organisations to create new arts-led opportunities that achieve positive health, education and social outcomes
- Create apprenticeship places for young people and volunteering opportunities

‘Artists have been inspired by the Surrey Hills throughout history and are still inspired today. Through the innovative responses of artists, visitors can experience the landscape in a new way.’

Ali Clarke, Programme Manager, Surrey Hills Arts

After the introduction, we went for a walk on the Farnham Heath to view the artworks. The rain didn't give us much pause, but in a landscape of outstanding beauty, bad weather does not ruin the experience. It only presents a different view.



This artwork represents fungi on a tree, an art project by students at the University of Creative Arts
www.surreyhills.org/heathland-artworks-returns/



Walter Bailey's "The House of Invisible Hands" – a shrine to those who made forest glass.
Peasants and children working long hours stoking the furnaces.

It is always enjoyable to see artwork, because of the impact it has. It might provoke, inspire, surprise or sooth. No matter what, artwork engages. It is a wonderful thing and a great contribution to the pilgrim experience, but also for anyone enjoying the outdoors.



An example of the art found along the path, a student project displaying birdhouses.

<https://www.surreyhills.org/discover/arts-culture-views/>

<https://www.surreyearthed.org/>

Black Horse Inn

Food and accommodation can at times be a challenge for pilgrims. Especially in remote areas of course. For lunch, we had a great experience at the Black Horse Inn, where they have served local food and drink for centuries.

Situated on the Pilgrims Way the route the Pilgrims took between Winchester and Canterbury, to the shrine of Thomas Beckett and mentioned in the 'Canterbury Tales' by Geoffrey Chaucer. The Inn has offered food, drink and bed and breakfast for weary travellers for hundreds of years.

The Black Horse Inn, Thurnham

The Black Horse Inn is a great example on how the storytelling of pilgrimage can add value to the business. They embraced their history and build on their traditions by offering local produce, an interior typical of the region and great service.



<https://www.blackhorsekent.co.uk/>

The North Downs Way National Trail has explored this further by teaming up with local breweries in Kent, Medway, and Surrey to create an “Ale Trail” for walkers to explore along the route.

Each brewery has dedicated an “Ale of The Trail” to become an official beer of the North Downs Way. Most ales have a link to the trail through either name, local ingredients or links to military or cultural heritage. All breweries involved contribute to the upkeep of the trail to help keep the route in top shape, maintain signage and keep pathways clear.

<https://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/north-downs-way/ales-trail>

White Horse Woods

Walking the North Downs Way gives a first class experience of the natural landscape in Kent. Even in pouring rain, as we had all day long, there is something calm and pleasant about the trail passing through open heights and dense woodlands.

The most common tree in Kent Downs is the ash tree. It can be several hundred years old and grows so tall and wide that it turns the trail into a tunnel.



In 2012 when ash dieback, (caused by the fungal pathogen *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*), was first discovered in England, the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty was one of the first areas to notice the rapid spread of the disease. The potential death of all ash trees in Kent Downs will definitely leave an enormous mark on the landscape. This is why the Ash Project came about, as an urgent cultural response to this devastating loss of one of the region's most important species of tree.

Project Manager of the Ash Project, Madeleine Hodge, taught us more about the tree as well as the project. The ash tree has long been associated with wisdom, knowledge, and divination. This is also the case for Norse Mythology, as Madeleine especially pointed out for the Norwegian participants.

"The Ash Project asks how we might mark and celebrate ash trees before it is too late. The project combines a major new commission by internationally recognised artists Ackroyd & Harvey with a wide-ranging walks, talks and workshops programme, an online archive and a Kent wide plan for landscape restoration. We are collaborating across conservation and scientific research work to develop a cultural approach that will preserve memories of the tree in extraordinary and enduring ways for the generations who will live with the loss."

Madeleine Hodge, Project Manager



Two statuesque monolith forms pierced, or firing thousands of 'devil's fingers', as arrows were nicknamed in the Middle Ages.

These monolithic sculptural works by the internationally renowned artists Ackroyd & Harvey are both a celebration of ash trees and memorial to the devastating effects of ash dieback on the most common tree in the Kent Downs. White Horse Wood Country Park is free to visit and open to the public. It is a natural stop on the North Downs Way.

<https://www.theashproject.org.uk/>

DAD - Dover Arts Development

Final stop of the day and end of the Staff Exchange took place in Dover, where we had a meeting with co-directors of Dover Arts Development (DAD), Joanna Jones & Clare Smith.



We met in the Urban room in the flat in Dover from where they are operating. We were seated around a table that could fit 12, under a chandelier in front of two large windows facing Dover city. The atmosphere was homely, almost giving the impression that our visit was a drop bye of friends.

Yet, nothing about our meeting was even remotely haphazard. Over the years, Joanna and Clare have built a portfolio of projects as part of their work with DAD – Dover Arts Development.

“We are committed to producing contemporary art of excellence, supporting artists’ practice, initiating cultural activity and feeding into Dover’s economy. We aim, with values of inclusiveness, thoughtful partnership and emotional responsibility, to strengthen communities and widen perspectives through creative thinking and actions.”

Joanna Jones & Clare Smith

The table of 12 was key to their project management. They used the table as a common ground for city councillors, artists and businessmen/women to meet. They invited them for food and drink, always making sure they never were more than 12 at one time. A residing artist usually prepared the food, making it both homely and exciting for their guests. Their aim was to break barriers between the different stakeholders, and make them pull together. Their invites were informal, but one rule applied. One topic only was allowed on the table at a time. In this way, they avoided people grouping in twos and threes.

By bringing people together, people that normally would not meet, they laid a foundation for future cooperation that has already manifested itself in Dover.

<https://www.dadonline.eu/>



From right to left: Catherine Bradley, Madeleine Hodge, Clare Smith, Are Skjelstad, Mary Muir, Lisa Skjellfjord, Peter Morris and Jack Davidson. Joanna Jones behind camera.