

Case Study

Monument Mentors – supporting volunteers to survey and monitor Scheduled Monuments on the South Downs

National Trust

The Vision

When monuments are scheduled, it means they have the highest level of protection available through Historic England. However, many have not been inspected for some time.

Training volunteers to recognise the types of damage that can affect a monument, and to inspect and report on its condition, can help prevent further deterioration and in some cases support efforts to repair damage. It also deepens connections with the landscape through understanding and action.

Key Facts

England has over 20,000 Scheduled Monuments – nationally important archaeological sites – but 1 in 9 of these are on the Heritage at Risk Register, highlighting that they are deteriorating due to neglect, erosion, development, or lack of use.

Many monuments haven't been assessed in decades, leaving their current condition unknown and vulnerable to loss of visibility and understanding.



Monument Mentors on a large Earthwork on the Downs. Credit: K Hibberd, National Trust

What we achieved

150 Scheduled Monuments were surveyed by trained volunteers, with the results shared publicly on Historic England's website. June 2026 reporting shows 283 contributions have been made using Changing Chalk methodology, with uploads still occurring within and beyond the project area – demonstrating the success of using new approaches, while utilising existing systems.

There is now a better understanding of the condition of monuments in the project area. Volunteers have become invested in the protection of monuments, and in some cases have 'adopted' a monument.

Several sites were identified as being at risk from excessive scrub growth, so volunteers and partners worked to clear vegetation, not only protecting monuments but improving the setting and visibility for visitors and future monitoring.

We have created Management Plans to ensure ongoing protection of monuments through reliable and regular baseline information.

The guides for how to monitor monuments have been made widely available and adopted by volunteers and landowners. National Parks, Historic England, and other partners have committed £20,000 for follow-on work in 2026 to promote Monument Mentors to a national audience.

How we did it

We developed a data capture methodology in a collaboration between Historic England (HE), the National Trust, and the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) over several months.

We commissioned a consultancy to carry out research, produce the necessary documentation, and identify stakeholders (local volunteers) to understand current approaches, highlight areas needing improvements, and test ways of working.

Training was delivered through hands-on group outings, where volunteers learned to identify damage agents and discuss monument conditions collectively. Participants were equipped with

tools such as measuring tapes and scales to carry out surveys independently in areas meaningful to them.

We ran three training sessions for SDNPA rangers and volunteers, focusing on identifying threats and using data effectively.

Outreach was key – raising awareness of the project and linking it to HE's Missing Pieces Project, where the data is stored.

We also worked to embed volunteer Mentors into existing frameworks, like the National Trust's Heritage Archaeology Ranger Team or partner volunteering opportunities, ensuring long-term sustainability and integration.

“ The walks always help unlock the hidden features... it's a great way of bringing together archaeologists and people in the community who want to learn more of the history of their landscape. ”

Monument Mentors volunteer



Further information

[About Changing Chalk's Monument Mentors | National Trust](#)

[Missing Pieces Project: Share Your View of Unique Places | Historic England](#)

Lessons learnt

Success factors included empowering volunteers with tools and training to work independently, converting from led to self-led groups; regular, scheduled outings helped build consistency and commitment; resources developed during the project being made freely available for volunteers and land managers to use, both within the project area and beyond.

Barriers included inconsistent scheduling and reliance on partner websites, making participation unpredictable; some volunteers taking longer to feel confident working independently; difficulty in maintaining consistency across volunteer assessments; and low attendance at youth-focused sessions, despite their potential impact.

Recommendations for similar projects could be to prepare resources at the start of the project and start with ready-to-use resources where possible; maintain regular, predictable engagement opportunities; accept varied levels of volunteer confidence and adapt support accordingly; explore new ways to engage younger audiences, acknowledging their fluctuating interest; consider more structured engagement strategies for younger audiences and ensure accessibility.

The Changing Chalk Partnership

Led by the National Trust, Changing Chalk was a four-year partnership project from 2022 to 2026 working to reverse the ecological decline of chalk grassland in the eastern South Downs, bring histories to life, and connect local communities to the internationally significant landscape on their doorstep.

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/changing-chalk-partnership



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