

# VIEWPOINT

**REACHING FOR  
THE STARS**  
Exciting opportunities  
to view the cosmos

**RIVERS AT RISK**  
Help us rescue National  
Park rivers

**PARKS IN THE DARK**  
Explore the distinct  
subterranean spaces in  
National Parks

  
**CAMPAIGN** for  
**NATIONAL PARKS**

  
**YMGYRCH** y  
PARCIAU CENEDLAETHOL

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## WELCOME

Welcome to this latest edition of Viewpoint, where we're taking a truly unique view of our National Parks.

Aila Taylor takes us underground to explore the distinct subterranean spaces found beneath our National Parks (pages 6-9). In the earth itself, Emily Quilton guides us through the underground fungal networks that are the foundations of our forests (pages 12-13). We'll also dip our toes into the Cambrian lakes with Alisha Riley as she shares ancient stories of women and water (pages 14-15). Once we've resurfaced we can gaze above, making the most of the longer nights to view the cosmos, thanks to some of the darkest skies in the country (pages 16-17).

These articles are a timely reminder that there is always something new and exciting to discover in our National Parks. I myself will soon be making my annual autumn pilgrimage to Dunster in Exmoor National Park and, despite visiting most years since I was very small, I know I will find new walks, new stories and new experiences which will further solidify the area as one of my favourite places in the world.

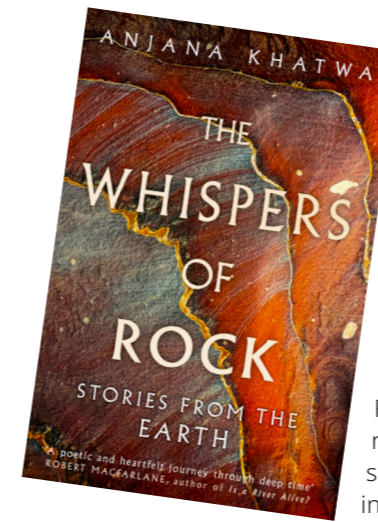
Sadly, the joy these places bring to so many people is often overlooked by those who have the greatest impact on them. Our Rivers at Risk campaign highlights some upsetting realities for the rivers in our National Parks (pages 10-11). However, knowledge is power and we are arming ourselves with the statistics to demand better for the waterways that are the lifeblood of our Parks.

Finally, I'd like to thank you for supporting our work. We know that with you behind us, no matter what new challenges come our way (page 3), we can continue to fight for nature-rich National Parks for everyone.

**Harriet Gardiner**  
Senior Communications Officer



The team in Bannau Brycheiniog



## BOOK GIVEAWAY

### *The Whispers of Rock*

*The Whispers of Rock* — A revelatory approach to geology, illuminated with untold stories of humanity's relationship with rock

From the sacred stones of Stonehenge to the rose-red city of Petra, from towering mountains to the smallest grains of sand, rocks have had a profound influence on human life.

Dr Anjana Khatwa, an award-winning earth scientist and TV presenter, has dedicated much of her life to geology. Here she tells us in beautifully descriptive writing how rocks have been shaped over the eons — but also how they have shaped us.

Boldly alternating between modern science and ancient lore, Khatwa takes us on an exhilarating journey through deep time from bursting volcanoes in the Andes to the wonder of the Dorset coastline, while honouring the Indigenous stories that have brought the land alive over the millennia.

She also explores how connecting with the earth has guided her through the toughest times and offers the hope of reconnection with the earth and its stories — if only we open ourselves to hear the wisdom in its whispers.

**To enter the prize draw, please email [info@cnp.org.uk](mailto:info@cnp.org.uk) with the subject line 'Book Giveaway' and include your full name and address. Draw closes on 8 December 2025.**

### DR ANJANA KHATWA

Dr Anjana Khatwa is an award-winning earth scientist who has worked for several universities, the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site and the National Trust. Dr Khatwa has contributed to and presented TV programmes for the BBC as well as ITV. She has been given the Geographical Award for public engagement by the Royal Geographical Society, the RH Worth Award by the Geological Society of London and the Halstead Medal from the Geologists' Association. In 2021, she received a National Diversity Award in recognition of her work to champion inclusion within earth science and natural heritage, and the same year was longlisted for the 2021 Nan Shepherd Prize for nature writing. She lives with her family in Dorset in a house filled with rocks and fossils collected from all over the world. *The Whispers of Rock* is her first book.

## NEWS

### STOP THE PRESS: PROTECTED LANDSCAPES DUTY SAFE

After speculation in early October that the UK Government was minded to repeal the Protected Landscapes duty, we are pleased to say that against the odds the duty will be retained.

This win is testament to what a small, agile, focused and incredibly passionate organisation like Campaign for National Parks can do. We called on over 200 charities, businesses and organisations, representing millions of people, to sign our letter to Sir Keir Starmer asking him not to weaken National Park protections. This unified voice across the sector sent a very clear message - that National Parks matter.



The Royal Courts of Justice

### BACK IN COURT

June saw us return to Court as part of our continuing campaign to secure effective implementation of the Protected Landscapes duty introduced in late 2023. This time we were supporting CPRE Kent's legal challenge of the approval of a major housing development in the High Weald National Landscape. CPRE Kent lost the case, but the judge's ruling includes important statements about the intended impact of the new duty which make it clear it should be taken seriously in future.

# NEWS

## NATIONAL PARK'S FUTURE LEADERS

This year, we brought together two groups of inspiring young people passionate about National Parks to connect, collaborate and hone their skills in leadership and campaigning. Part of our New Perspectives project, our Future Leaders courses are 3-month programmes each with a residential in a National Park at their heart.

Following the success of our first residential in Dartmoor last October, we delivered two further courses in April in the Yorkshire Dales and this September in Bannau Brycheiniog. Over three days, participants learn from experienced leaders and have opportunities to share their ideas with decision-makers.

Şeniz, a participant in our Yorkshire Dales residential, shared, "It was a welcoming space where, together, we could explore and discover. As a young campaigner, the experience has been invaluable."

As we look to the end of the programme, participants are already leading the way in shaping National Parks that can deliver for nature and future generations — in their careers, driving our campaigns or, for one, as a newly appointed Member of a National Park Authority.

Our residential in Bannau Brycheiniog was made possible thanks to **Ramble Worldwide Outdoor Trust**, the charitable trust of **Ramble Worldwide** who create guided and self-guided walking holidays that blend cultural discovery with the joy of exploring on foot — perfect for those who love to discover the world actively at a comfortable pace — and who now provide a discount code for our Friends. For more information visit [www.rambleworldwide.co.uk](http://www.rambleworldwide.co.uk)



Future Leaders in Malham Cove, Yorkshire Dales



Future Leaders in Penpont, Bannau Brycheiniog



## NATIONAL MARINE PARKS ALLIANCE LAUNCH

On 25 June 2025, we delivered the virtual launch event for the National Marine Parks (NMP) Alliance — an inclusive UK network formed for the open exploration and development of the UK's National Marine Parks vision.

We welcomed a diverse mix of over 100 attendees, representing community groups, Protected Landscapes, young people, fisheries, research institutes, public bodies, eNGOs, ports, harbours and more.

The main purpose of the launch event was to introduce the National Marine Parks vision, and to provide an exciting flavour of what the future could hold.

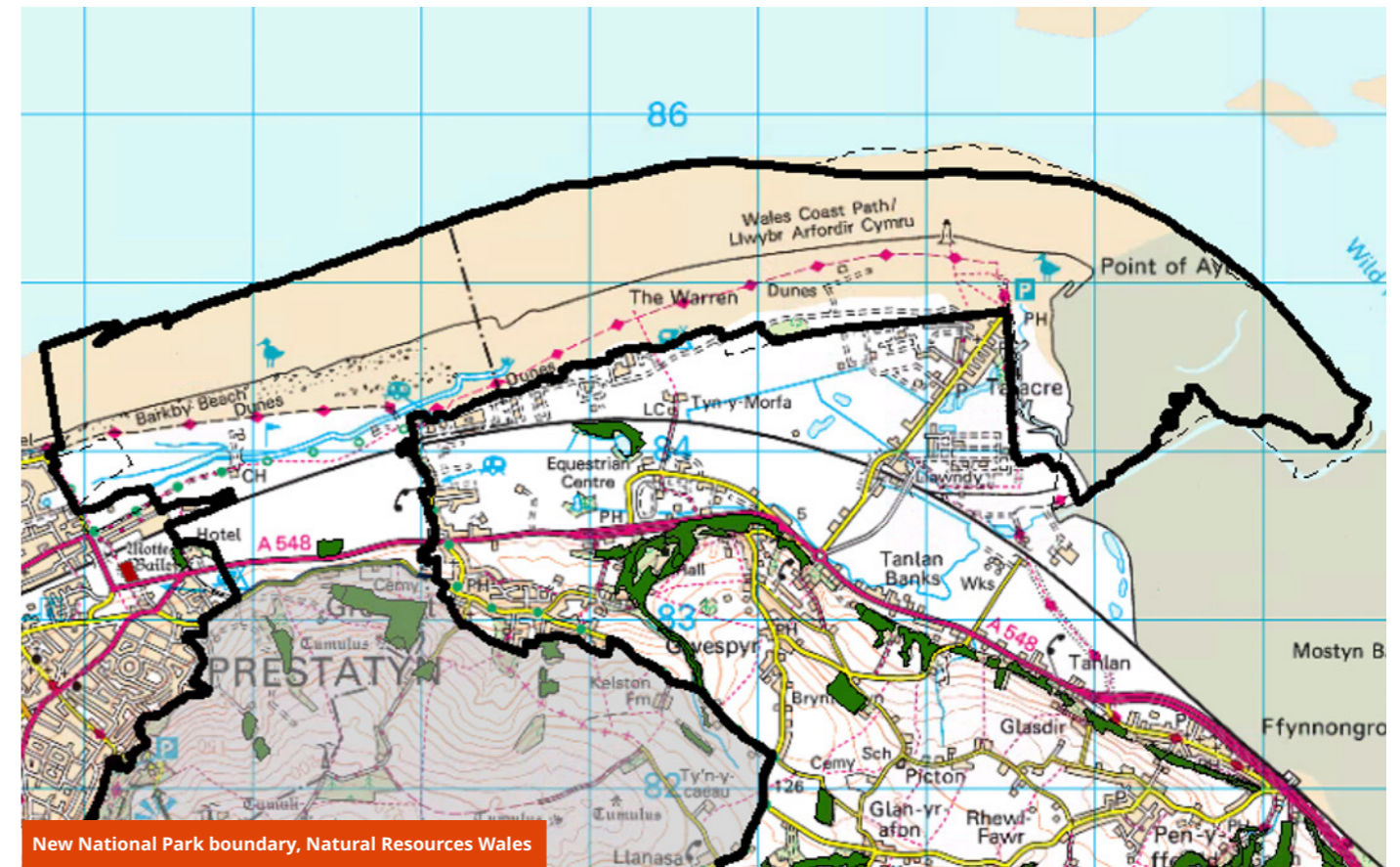
## UPDATE ON OUR RESHAPING OUR NATIONAL PARKS CAMPAIGN

Last December, the UK Government pledged new legislation to reform the governance of English National Parks, while the Welsh Government has committed to creating an 'exemplar' National Park in North East Wales. Building on this momentum, we launched a public campaign this summer urging Ministers to place nature recovery, social justice and youth voices at the heart of these reforms. We're delighted that young people from our Future Leaders course will present their vision for change directly to the Westminster Government this autumn.

## GRONANT AND TALACRE DUNES MAINTAINED IN NEW NATIONAL PARK

Last year we raised our voices to urge Natural Resources Wales to reinstate the coastal reaches of the proposed new National Park boundary in North East Wales.

As the National Park moves into its final round of statutory public consultation (live until 8 December), despite the loss of some areas in the south of the proposed boundary, we are pleased to see the re-inclusion of Gronant and Talacre Dunes. The future of the new Park is, however, not yet secured and we are urging citizens across Wales to engage with the consultation and back the proposed boundary.



# Parks in the Dark

**Aila Taylor guides us through the distinct subterranean spaces found in National Parks in England and Wales**

The National Parks of England and Wales are widely appreciated for their natural beauty and cultural heritage. However, much of this appreciation focuses on heights — from the chalk hills of the South Downs to the sharp ridgelines of the Lake District — while ignoring the depths below.

From the vertical, fern-lined potholes of the Yorkshire Dales to the maze-like passages of South Wales, to the haunting mines of Eryri, our National Parks are full of subterranean spaces of all shapes and forms. The character of these spaces is distinct to each National Park, and they are an essential part of what makes these Protected Landscapes so unique.

## **AILA TAYLOR**

Parks in the Dark, created by Aila Taylor as part of our New Perspectives project, is a zine which aims to shed light (pun intended) on the remarkable spaces underneath our National Parks.

Read Aila's zine in full by scanning the QR code.



PART OF  
**NEW**  
PERSPECTIVES



Lucy Hyde in Cloud Chamber,  
Dan yr Ogor by Harry Kettle

## BANNAU BRYCHEINIOG

Bannau Brycheiniog is home to the UK's deepest cave, Ogof Ffynnon Ddu (Cave of the Black Spring, colloquially known as 'OFD'), which is 274 metres deep and has 31 miles of passages.

The National Park also contains the largest cave entrance in Wales at Porth yr Ogof (gateway to the cave), also the longest cave in Wales and the second longest in Britain, after the Three Counties System in the Yorkshire Dales National Park. Ogof y Daren Cilau (cave of the outcrop with many nooks) contains the largest passage in the UK, known as 'the Time Machine'.

## YORKSHIRE DALES

The rugged limestone landscape of the Yorkshire Dales is characterised by unique geological features such as limestone pavements, cliffs (known as 'scars') and complex cave systems. What makes the caves of the Yorkshire Dales unique is the vast number of potholes — deep, vertical shafts going down into the caves.

Many of these caves are part of the Three Counties System — the longest cave system in the UK at 89km, with over 50 entrances, and counting as new sections of cave are explored.

## PEAK DISTRICT

A distinctive feature of the underground Peak District is that, rather than existing separately, mines and caves are interlinked, with passages from a mine leading into natural cave passage. It is where the lines of natural history and industrial history blur together. For example, the 18th century James Hall's Over Engine Mine (known colloquially as 'JH') drops into the Peak-Speedwell cave system after almost 200 metres of vertical shafts. In the same way caves do, these now-abandoned mines provide important habitats for wildlife such as bats; a perfect example of the way heritage can support nature conservation.

## ERYRI

Eryri is home to some truly spectacular, cavernous places. Places created by the hard manual labour of generations of miners. Places where communities were formed, riches were made, and men died.

There are four key jewels to the crown that is North Walian mining: the slate mines of Blaenau Ffestiniog, the metal mines of the Gwydyr Forest, the copper mines of central Snowdonia, and the lead mines of the Milwr. Each place is fascinating in its own right. They are places where the last marks of the men and boys who made the places can be found — from their tools to the newspapers they read, to their last footprints when they downed tools and left the mine for the last time.

Each National Park and Landscape includes subterranean spaces with distinct characteristics, and this variety is part of what makes them so unique. Despite this, they are often overlooked in National Park management. If we are to truly 'conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage' of National Parks, as outlined by the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, then it is important to raise awareness of the world beneath our National Parks, enable people to experience, and invest more time and money into protecting it.

...they are an essential part of what makes these Protected Landscapes so unique.

## PARCIAU YN Y TYWYLLWCH

Mae Parciau Cenedlaethol Cymru a Lloegr yn cael eu gwerthfawrogi'n eang am eu harddwch naturiol a'u treftadaeth ddiwylliannol. Fodd bynnag, mae llawer o'r gwerthfawrogiad hwn yn canolbwyntio ar uchderau - o fryniau sialc y Twyni Deheuol i gribau miniog Ardal y Llynnoedd - gan anwybyddu'r dyfnderoedd islaw.

O dyllau ffordd fertigol, wedi'u leinio â rhedyn, Dyffrynnoedd Swydd Efrog i dramwyfeydd tebyg i ddrysfâ De Cymru, i fwyngloddiau atgofus Eryri, mae ein Parciau Cenedlaethol yn llawn gofodau tanddaearol o bob siâp a ffurf. Mae cymeriad y mannau hyn yn unigryw i bob Parc Cenedlaethol, ac maent yn rhan hanfodol o'r hyn sy'n gwneud y gall treftadaeth gefnogi cadwraeth natur.

## BANNAU BRYCHEINIOG

Mae Bannau Brycheiniog yn gartref i ogof ddyfnaf y DU, Ogof Ffynnon Ddu (a elwir ar lafar gwlad yn 'OFD'), sydd 274 metr o ddyfnder ac sydd â 31 milltir o dramwyfeydd.

Mae'r Parc Cenedlaethol hefyd yn cynnwys y fynyddfa ogof fwyaf yng Nghymru ym Mhorth yr Ogof, yr ogof hiraf yng Nghymru a'r ail hiraf ym Mhrydain, ar ôl System y Tair Sir ym Mharc Cenedlaethol Dyffrynnoedd Swydd Efrog. Mae Ogof y Daren Cilau yn cynnwys y dramwyfa fwyaf yn y DU, a elwir yn 'y Peiriant Amser'.

## DYFFRYNNOEDD SWYDD EFRUG

Nodweddir tirwedd galchfaen arw Dyffrynnoedd Swydd Efrog gan nodweddion daearegol unigryw fel palmentydd calchfaen, clogwyni (a elwir yn 'greithiau') a systemau ogofâu cymhleth. Yr hyn sy'n gwneud ogofâu Dyffrynnoedd Swydd Efrog yn unigryw yw'r nifer fawr o dyllau - siafftau dwfn, fertigol sy'n mynd i lawr i'r ogofâu.

Mae llawer o'r ogofâu hyn yn rhan o System y Tair Sir — y system ogofâu hiraf yn y DU sy'n 89km, gyda dros 50 o fynyddfeydd, sy'n parhau i dyfu wrth i rannau newydd o'r ogofâu gael eu harchwilio.

## ARDAL Y COPAON

Nodwedd nodedig rhan tanddaearol Ardal y Copaon yw, yn hytrach na bodoli ar wahân, bod mwyngloddiau ac ogofâu wedi'u cysylltu â'i gilydd, gyda darnau o fwynglawdd yn arwain i mewn i ddarn ogofâu naturiol. Dyma lle mae llinellau hanes naturiol a hanes diwydiannol yn aneglur. Er enghraifft, mae Mwynglawdd Over Engine James Hall o'r 18fed ganrif (a elwir ar lafar gwlad yn 'JH') yn disgyn i system ogofâu Peak-Speedwell ar ôl bron i 200 metr o siafftau fertigol. Yn yr un modd ag y mae ogofâu yn ei wneud, mae'r mwyngloddiau hyn, sydd bellach yn ofer, yn darparu cynefinoedd pwysig i fywyd gwylt fel ystumod, gan ddarparu enghraifft berffaith o'r ffordd y gall treftadaeth gefnogi cadwraeth natur.

## ERYRI

Mae Eryri yn gartref i railleoedd ogofaidd gwirioneddol ysbennydd. Lleoedd a grëwyd gan lafur caled cenedlaethau o lowyr. Mannau lle ffurfiwyd cymunedau, lle gwnaed cyfoeth, a lle bu farw dynion.

Mae pedwar gem allweddol i goron mwyngloddio Gogledd Cymru: mwyngloddiau llechi Blaenau Ffestiniog, mwyngloddiau metel Coedwig Gwydyr, mwyngloddiau copr canol Eryri, a mwyngloddiau plwm y Milwr. Mae pob lle yn ddiddorol yn ei rinwedd ei hun.

Mae pob Parc Cenedlaethol a thirwedd yn cynnwys mannau tanddaearol â nodweddion penodol, ac mae'r amrywiad hwn yn rhan o'r hyn sy'n eu gwneud mor unigryw. Er gwaethaf hyn, maent yn aml yn cael eu hanwybyddu wrth reoli Parciau Cenedlaethol. Os ydym am 'warchod a gwella harddwch naturiol, bywyd gwylt a threftadaeth ddiwylliannol' Parciau Cenedlaethol yn wirioneddol, fel yr amlinellwyd gan Ddeddf Parciau Cenedlaethol a Mynediad i Gefn Gwlad 1949, yna mae'n bwysig codi ymwybyddiaeth o'r byd o dan ein Parciau Cenedlaethol, galluogi pobl i brofi a buddsoddi mwy o amser ac arian i'w warchod.

# RIVERS AT RISK



**SEWAGE WORKS INSIDE THE NATIONAL PARKS ARE SPILLING SEWAGE FOR TWICE AS LONG AS OUTSIDE NATIONAL PARKS.**

National Park waterways are the most important the country. They are internationally renowned wetlands, glacial lakes, chalk streams and sensitive headwaters.

Yet even in precious National Parks, freshwaters are neglected: not given the protected status or appropriate investment they need. Despite being in National Parks, the majority of rivers (57%) are failing thanks to agricultural pollution and poor investment from the water industry.

Rivers are the lifeblood of our National Parks, which is why in September we launched our Rivers at Risk campaign to ensure Ministers in England and Wales finally give National Park waters the protection they deserve.

Help us Rescue our Rivers. Learn more about our Rivers at Risk report and take action with us.



**IN 2024  
254,808  
HOURS  
OF SEWAGE  
SPILT INTO  
NATIONAL PARK  
WATERWAYS**

Hours of sewage spilled into National Parks in 2024



## RIVER MEON – DRAINED AND IN DANGER

The River Meon is one of the world's 200 precious chalk streams (80% of which are in Southern England). With gin clear waters weaving through the South Downs National Park, the River Meon is a stunning river home to iconic species such as water voles, kingfishers and many of our native fish species.

Even though it's an incredibly rare habitat the River Meon is at risk from acute over-abstraction — removal of water from a natural source for a variety of uses such as drinking water.



## RIVER CLEDDAU – POLLUTED TO THE BRINK

The River Cleddau is home to a magical array of wildlife such as otters, sea trout (sewin) and salmon. Sightings of otters are becoming increasingly rare, and populations of salmon are considered at risk of extinction by Natural Resources Wales.

A once thriving and abundant river is now "taking a beating from sewage, farming, industry and more", according to the Cleddau Project. "Climate change is piling on the pressure and the whole ecosystem is in trouble."

Images: River Meon by Harriet Gardiner (left) River Cleddau by Andy Davies

## RIVER WYE – CHEMICAL COCKTAIL

Rising from Axe Edge Moor, a significant source of four rivers in the Peak District, the River Wye is a major tributary to the River Derwent which then feeds into the River Trent before making its way out to the Humber and the North Sea.

Unfortunately, declining water quality in the river has been firmly in the news since reported concentrations of pharmaceutical pollution were at levels of concern for both human and ecological health.



## LYMINGTON RIVER – SWIMMING IN SEWAGE

The River Lymington is a beautiful stream that runs through the New Forest National Park and an internationally important Special Area of Conservation. Upstream, the waters are clean and pure, and a vital resource for wildlife in the forest, from rare birds like nightjar and curlew to animals such as pine martin, as well as the wild-roaming ponies that are so important to the ecosystem.

Although 75% of the river's water bodies are currently in good ecological status, this doesn't tell the full story and sections of the river have been deemed unsafe for swimming in recent years.

Images: River Wye by Millie Barlow, Lymington River and River Bure by Harriet Gardiner



## RIVER BURE – RARE NATURE IN NEED OF RESCUE

Norfolk is home to around 10% of England's chalk streams and rivers. The River Bure is one such chalk waterway with a significant role to play in the support of nationally important wildlife and habitats. Stretching 51km out to sea, the River Bure and its many interconnected broads and fens contain pike and perch, otters, bittern and marsh harriers.

Despite its value for wildlife, 93% of waterbodies on the river are in a moderate to poor state.



# The Trees Talking

Artist Emily Quilton takes us down into the earth of the New Forest where, if you listen closely, you can hear the trees talking

PART OF  
**NEW**  
PERSPECTIVES



## EMILY QUILTON

Emily Quilton is a visual communicator based in Suffolk. A multidisciplinary artist, she specialises in photography, having graduated from Marine and Natural History Photography at Falmouth University in 2024. She is known for combining techniques like photography, graphics, stitch and print to create visually interesting outcomes.

Scan the QR code to explore her full project.



Trees have been a source of inspiration for centuries, evoking a primal sense of wonder. They are the storytellers of the seasons woven into the backdrops of our lives, but it's easy to overlook their significance. I've been working on a project based in the New Forest called The Trees Talking, with grant support from Campaign for National Parks and the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Did you know? Forests cover just 13.3% of the UK's total land area — in England that figure drops to 10%. It's no secret that we have one of the lowest tree coverage percentages in Europe. Since the Middle Ages, England has lost over 90% of its ancient woodland. The complex biodiversity in ancient woodland is irreplaceable, which is why protecting areas like the New Forest is vital.

Located in Hampshire, the New Forest was established over 1,000 years ago, when William the Conqueror named it Nova Foresta in 1079. This patchwork of forests covers an astonishing 219 square miles and became a National Park in 2005. Home to the oldest tree in England, the Knightwood Oak, thought to have been planted in 1600, the New Forest is believed to have the highest concentration of ancient trees in Western Europe — making it a truly special place. With famous texts like Alice in Wonderland being inspired by its charm, there are countless stories of witches, ghosts and fairies lurking within the undergrowth. Though it sounds like folklore, the trees are talking and we are only beginning to understand their language.

Whilst the scientific understanding of tree communication is still evolving, the evidence points to a dynamic system of underground fungal networks, dubbed the 'wood wide web' by forest ecologist Dr. Suzanne Simard. There are infinite biological networks under the ground that connect trees to one another, making the roots and soils the foundations of the forest.

Mycorrhizal fungi latch onto the end of roots and take sugars from the tree. It's these fungi that facilitates the sharing of nutrients, wisdom and water between trees. Through these connections trees can send warning signals to one another about pests, drought or disease. Research from Dr Simard found that there is a mother tree within the network: the oldest tree that has the most communication with the trees around. She found that trees are species-specific in who they communicate with, prioritizing their own offspring — yes, they can tell which saplings are their own. This symbiotic relationship between fungi and tree puts into perspective how interconnected all these species are. It almost reflects humanity, thriving in the care and company of others — supporting, nourishing, and growing alongside one another.

“  
**The clearest way into  
the universe is through a  
forest wilderness**  
- John Muir

In today's fast-paced, modern world, many people experience eco-anxiety: a sense of helplessness about the future of the planet. Yet there is a sense of irony, as immersing ourselves in a forest reduces stress, lowers blood pressure and improves our mood. By connecting to something larger than ourselves, we become small, offering a sense of perspective and grounding. This highlights how important these areas are and why we need to protect them because it might just be the answer in reducing eco-anxiety.

My project focuses on this line of exploration, collaborating with nature to create a unique way to see the New Forest, where photography and subject meet. The creation of the images was a grounding experience, working with natural elements in a tactile process to produce a visual outcome. The

process was far from ordinary, taking analogue photos of the woodland and then boiling the unprocessed rolls of film in water taken from streams in the imagery. The rolls were boiled for 5 minutes then soaked in the solution for 24 hours. This process is known as film soup and the results have a vibrant, colourful and liquid quality. The film was then processed by The Minilab in Northampton. This process handed over creative control to nature, allowing it to have a word in this silent conversation.

The results are unpredictable and you can't be precious about the destruction of the images. Rich in texture and colour, the images have evolved into an abstract representation of what a woodland looks like. The work creates wonder for the world around and inspires a greater appreciation, recognizing that trees are not just a resource to be managed but part of a community to be respected. However, it can leave the viewer uneasy as they face a juxtaposition of seeing the familiar in a surreal way, nature in the unnatural. Nature is powerful and it's refreshing to see work that shows the New Forest in an abstract way, maybe one that can be associated with developing scientific understanding of the forest we can't physically see.

Every tree tells a story of time, community and care. When you're next in a forest, standing in the middle of a vast connected living system, try to begin hearing the silent words being spoken beneath your feet.

“  
**To really feel a forest  
canopy, we must use  
different senses. And  
often the most useful  
one is the sense of  
imagination.**  
- Joan Maloof

Image by Emily Quilton

# Women in the water: Feminine folklore in two Cumbrian lakes

Writer Alisha Riley brings ancient stories to life



Minnnows dash like golden hyphens, pressing their slick lips against my ankle bone as the pale slug of my foot invades the pygmyweed. I turn my toes between its leaves before treading through, hoping to crush as little of anything as possible. Bassenthwaite Lake embraces the tension of opposites. Ergonomically twisted ash trees, berry-heavy brambles and bright lichen weave a veil between the busy road that connects Keswick to Cockermouth and the uninterrupted, wild drama of the valley. The fragment of shoreline I've chosen is secluded enough to air-dry after swimming, but vast enough to see forever.

Further along the shore stands a memorial stone depicting Nimue's (the lady of the lake in Arthurian legend) hand raised to accept the return of the enchanted sword, Excalibur. Bassenthwaite is one of several British waters rumoured to be Nimue's and, by extension, Excalibur's resting place. With its ethereal beauty reflecting Skiddaw's sunlit shoulder, it seems a good fit for a goddess. Three mallards dabble gladly nearby, unperturbed by my clumsy wading, as a slender object rising above the surface grabs my attention.

From mermaids and selkies to Aphrodite rising from seafoam, water's lore and women's lore are indivisible. Like the slippery realm they inhabit, aquatic entities reflect concepts of femininity, from the ideal to the defective. The lady of the lake is enigmatic, wise, and protects a great power that she has no use for but can be bequeathed to the right man. In this way, she conveys an archetypal, 'flawless' womanhood. Conversely, the lesser-known yet equally impressive Jenny Greenteeth embodies a typically disfigured femininity. I consider these differences as I dunk my head beneath the water and swim toward the mysterious object. When I come up, it's nowhere to be seen.

Jenny Greenteeth is an anthropophagous aquatic hag dreamt into existence by Northern English

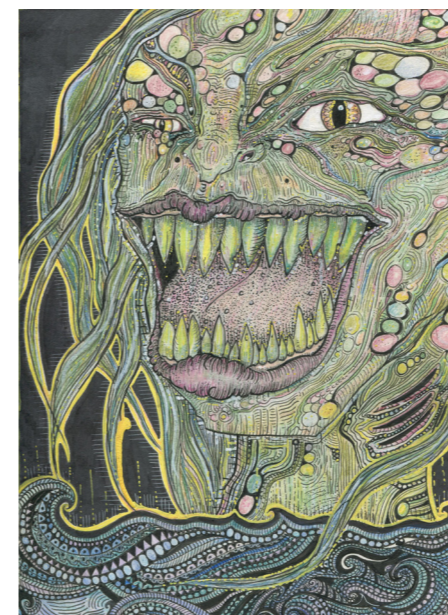
folklore. She skulks silently under duckweed, waiting for the very young or very old to stray too close to the water's edge before seizing their ankles and dragging them under. Jenny is robbed of humanity; she has no backstory. She's an amphibious ghoulish, yet still human enough for her dining habits to be cannibalistic. Like Nimue, she is a child-snatcher (Nimue is said to have kidnapped Lancelot as a baby and raised him to be the great knight we know from lore), but she lacks the maternal instinct required of a heroine and instead rips the flesh from her prey with viridescent fangs. Nimue is a force of nature: mysterious, powerful, and pure, but Jenny personifies a morally bereft, untamed wilderness. She is feral and dangerous: a cautionary tale.

then floating horizontal above the inky depths. I gasp as cool water tickles the back of my neck, then duck my head under, finding no half-devoured cadavers, no dismembered limbs; in fact, there are no signs of a wretched tarn-hag at all. Disappointed, I flip onto my back, closing my eyes to the sun.

The metallic flash of a damselfly vibrates inches from my nose while I float aimlessly across the tarn. Nebulous life-forms brush my shoulders as I orbit and enter a cool spot just beyond the light's reach. Something large looms below me; I can sense the presence of bundled atoms buzzing, drawing closer. Probably a fat trout, I tell myself, but my pulse quickens as the water cools. Something sharp and skinny runs along my spine. I twist, spluttering, into a frantic front crawl, sensing wrinkled, webbed fingers lunging for my heels. As I scramble to my feet, I eyeball the velvet current for a glimmer of green, seeing nothing but winking light and water lilies, trembling softly in the breeze.



“  
**Nimue is a force of nature: mysterious, powerful, and pure, but Jenny personifies a morally bereft, untamed wilderness.**




I walk south of Bassenthwaite, along Derwentwater, and up to Borrowdale rainforest's plush moss carpets, ferns, and vibrant mushrooms dripping from trees and clustered between their roots like jewels. A buzzard mews from the canopy as I hike toward a hanging valley - home to the tiny hamlet of Watendlath and its eponymous seven-acre tarn. A throng of water lilies ripple lazily, their skinny legs rooted in the corrie floor, gnawed into the landscape by glacial erosion. The secluded tarn is smaller than Bassenthwaite. Like the mythic entity inhabiting it, Watendlath is more localised, darker, but with little difference in depth. Its peaty edges and potential for overgrowth provide a perfect haunt for predatory grindylows like Jenny Greenteeth.

Cautiously, I press into the wet pebbles where the tarn begins. Watendlath is smokier than Bassenthwaite due to the slow decomposition of its plant matter, which swirls around my ankles as I inch deeper, pushing my toes under stones to stay upright. The ground shifts beneath me, wraps dirt-fingers around my legs, and I am suddenly deeper than expected. Beneath the swirling peat and silk ripples, the earth slips away in shocking dips, and I'm navel-deep,

## ALISHA RILEY

Alisha Riley is a writer, illustrator, and folklore enthusiast captivated by the intersection of beauty and repulsion. Her poem 'In the Dirt' won the 2024 Nature writing prize (you can read it at [substack.com/alishariley](https://substack.com/alishariley)), and she's working on her debut novel, which weaves psychology, metamorphoses, nature, and myth together into a disturbing, fleshy, glitterball. She is currently getting into birds and has a particular fondness for skylarks.

Alisha Riley is the winner of the 2025 Working Class Writers Nature Prize which was set up in 2020 to help break down barriers to nature writing and what is perceived as a nature writer. We are proud to support the Working Class Writers Nature Prize.

 **Image: Watendlath Tarn, Lake District by Alisha Riley**

**Illustrations: Nimue (top) Jenny Greenteeth (bottom) by Alisha Riley**

# Reaching for the stars

**As the nights draw in, Exmoor's Dark Sky Reserve provides an inviting and exciting opportunity to view the cosmos**

Exmoor National Park was designated as the very first International Dark Sky Reserve in Europe in 2011. With some of the darkest skies in the country thanks to minimal light pollution, Exmoor's designation ensures that through careful management and protection the night skies above, Exmoor will continue to be dark for all to enjoy.

Exmoor is perfect for a nighttime adventure and with the introduction of their 3.2 km Dark Sky Discovery Trail, on a clear night you will have a 360degree view of the cosmos. The path starts above Exford and takes you to the ruins of Larkbarrow Farm within the core of the Dark Sky Reserve. Follow the glow in the dark trail markers to immerse yourself in the wonders of Exmoor at night with unparalleled stargazing opportunities.



Image: Exmoor Dark Sky Reserve by Leah Drage

## LEAH'S TOP TIPS FOR PHOTOGRAPHING NIGHT SKIES

Leah Drage is a Northamptonshire based photographer and videographer and one of our New Perspectives grantees. Leah created a short documentary highlighting photography as a great way to experience time outside at night in Exmoor. Here are her top tips:

**Plan ahead** — Lots of things can affect how successful your astrophotography can be, but weather is a big one. From avoiding clouds to prepping your gear for extreme temperatures, planning ahead is vital.

**Location, location, location** — Choosing a time and place for your night beneath the stars can make or break your photos. Light pollution can reduce your chances of having a great view of the night sky, which is why UK National Parks are the perfect place to be!

**Consider the moon** — If the moon is bright, it can outshine the stars and wash out the sky in your final photos. Know the phases— time your shoots around a new moon and you'll be in much darker skies!

**Get to know your camera settings** — Finding a nice balance between wide aperture and a high ISO while sticking to manual focus is the way to go. It might take a bit of trial and error, but the results are worth it.

**Trust your camera** — Photography is an incredible way to spend time outside at night. Get the settings right and leave the camera to do its thing while you take in the sky and figure out what exactly it is that you're looking at!

Watch Leah's documentary — Exmoor at night, by scanning the QR code.



With artificial light disturbing nighttime ecosystems, it's not just us who benefit from the dark skies. Nocturnal species thrive on Exmoor including many varieties of insect, owls and 16 of the 17 breeding British bat species.



## DARK SKIES IN OTHER UK NATIONAL PARKS

Bannau Brycheiniog (Brecon Beacons) International Dark Sky Reserve — Wales, designated in 2012

Northumberland Dark Sky Park — England's first International Dark Sky Park, designated in 2013

Eryri (Snowdonia) International Dark Sky Reserve — Wales, designated in 2015

South Downs International Dark Sky Reserve — England, designated in 2016

Cairngorms Dark Sky Park — Scotland, designated in 2018

Yorkshire Dales International Dark Sky Reserve — England, designated in 2020

North York Moors International Dark Sky Reserve — England, designated in 2020

Image: Milky Way over the Dark Skies Discovery Trail, Exmoor by Shaun Davey via Exmoor Commons

# Do you want to help us protect National Parks — now and forever?

National Parks are stunning, iconic landscapes. From windswept tors and dazzling forests to mountain summits and winding rivers, these places inspire us all. But behind the beauty lies a stark truth: our Parks are becoming increasingly polluted and degraded.

We helped create National Parks. Now we're fighting to save them.

## THE CRISIS

Our ground-breaking Health Check report uncovered shocking statistics: only 6% of National Park land is managed effectively for nature, almost four in every five acres of peatland are damaged, and over half of National Park rivers are classed as 'failing' because of sewerage releases and pollution.

The problems are many: habitat destruction, pollution and intensive land use are squeezing wildlife into ever-smaller spaces. To make matters worse, decision-makers often lack ecological expertise and fail to represent those who live in, visit and love the Parks.

**Last year you raised £15,000 for National Parks, which meant that we've been able to do more research and influence more decisions. Because of our amazing supporters just like you, we think we can beat it this year!**

“  
**National Parks are essential to use, enjoy and appreciate... Good for the soul and our general well-being.**

- The late Dame Patricia Routledge DBE,  
Campaign for National Parks supporter

## THE SOLUTION

For nearly 90 years, Campaign for National Parks has fought for these treasured places. Guided by local people, communities and national organisations, we use research to uncover what's really happening in our Parks and then press decision-makers to act.

We are the voice for National Parks:

- Standing up in court to set legal precedents that protect wildlife and water.
- Campaigning for stronger policies, better legislation and accountable leadership.
- Inspiring a new generation of National Park champions, so these landscapes are protected not just for today, but for the future.

There is still time to turn things around. Nature is resilient. With the right protection and action, habitats can recover, rivers can flow clean again, and wildlife can thrive. But we cannot do this alone, we need your support to keep up the fight. Will you support us this Christmas by donating to save National Parks now and forever?

## DOUBLE YOUR DONATION AT NO EXTRA COST

Campaign for National Parks has once again been chosen to take part in a very special initiative which enables our supporters like you to make a donation which is then doubled at no extra cost. Run by The Big Give, their Christmas Challenge 2025 will be held for just one week from **Tuesday 2 December at 12 noon to Tuesday 9 December at 12 noon**. Every £10 you donate is worth £20, and every £50 you donate is worth £100, until our match-funding pot runs out. If you want to help safeguard these landscapes now and forever, this is the perfect time make your donation go further.

## GET READY TO MAKE YOUR DONATION

Donations can only be doubled if they are made through The Big Give webpage using the address: [www.bit.ly/nationalparksforever](http://www.bit.ly/nationalparksforever) or by **scanning the QR code** on your smartphone or tablet. You will then be able to donate quickly and securely using your credit or debit card. Remember, donations have to be made between Tuesday 2 December and Tuesday 9 December only, or until the match-funding pot runs dry.

## DONATE BY POST

If you'd rather not wait until Christmas, you can donate today by cheque, card, or CAF card or voucher by using the tear-off slip on the enclosed letter and posting it to us at Canopi, 82 Tanner Street SE1 3GN. Please make cheques and CAF vouchers payable to 'Campaign for National Parks'.

SCAN TO DONATE



Christmas  
Challenge

BigGive



# National Parks: Dream to Reality

2026 will mark 90 years since Campaign for National Parks began. Back in 1936, National Parks were only a dream — tireless campaigners made them become a reality.

Since then, these places have given nature room to thrive and people space to breathe.

Today, legacies keep that spirit alive. Over a third of our work is funded by gifts in wills; in Wales, our programme is 100% legacy-funded, powering change for people and wildlife.

If National Parks matter to you, please consider leaving a gift in your will to Campaign for National Parks. All

your solicitor needs is our charity number and registered address. We hope the enclosed bookmark is a useful reminder. Thank you.

Details for your solicitor:

Campaign for National Parks, Registered Charity Number 295336, Registered Address: Campaign for National Parks, Canopi, 82 Tanner Street, London, SE1 3GN

For more information please email [info@cnp.org.uk](mailto:info@cnp.org.uk) or telephone 020 3096 7714

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NATIONAL PARKS

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