



LIVING BY THE ASH TREE WATERS

Connect with your cultural streamside heritage

A series of streamside walks, with Nature Explorer Backpacks designed by local children and environmental artist James Aldridge, and picnics with a community choir performance led by folk musician Paul Sartin.

The name Andover comes from the Anglo-Saxon word 'Andefera', meaning 'Place by the ash-tree waters'. The 'waters' are the chalk rivers enriching life across the landscape.

Today we celebrate our chalk streams and the ash trees that grow alongside them, hoping to inspire curiosity in local residents about our rich natural and cultural heritage. Ash trees are disappearing due to Ash Dieback disease, and chalk streams are increasingly threatened, so it is important to keep the knowledge and memories alive.

The choral performances will include river-related, traditional songs, several of which refer to the local history of watercress growing, in particular the Watercress Queen, Eliza James, who went from hawking cress as a five-year-old on the Birmingham streets, to owning a vast empire of watercress beds in Surrey and Hampshire (St Marybourne & Hurstbourne Priors), a near-monopoly of the London commercial trade and coining the trade name 'Vitacress'.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eliza_James

www.andovertrees.org.uk



@Andover_Trees



Why are chalk streams important?

Chalk rivers are rare and unique habitats. There are only around 200 across the world, and England has 85% of them.

Ecologically, they support an array of life. Emerging as springs from aquifers in the chalk bedrock, the water is pure, rich in minerals, and stays a fairly constant temperature all year round. This allows a range of aquatic plants to grow - such as water-crowfoot and yellow flag-iris - which support many invertebrates and fish species.

The fast-flowing cold water with high oxygen levels, moving over flinty gravel beds, provide the perfect conditions for various fish species, including salmon and trout, to lay their eggs. The high levels of calcium allow animals with exoskeletons, like freshwater snails and shrimp, to thrive. And the alkaline water buffers acids, maintaining a stable pH level - important for sensitive invertebrates like mayflies and caddis flies, which in turn feed fish, birds, and other fauna.

Dazzling kingfishers, elusive otters, endangered water voles, and increasingly rare white-clawed crayfish can all be found on chalk streams.



The waterways you see are not entirely natural, however, but have been shaped by centuries of human activity. They have been altered and harnessed to provide water to people, animals, and industry, power to mills, annual flooding for meadows, irrigation, navigation, and more. Hampshire as we know it was shaped by this history, and the livelihoods of local people depended on the rivers. Now, the county is famous for fly fishing and growing watercress.

Sadly, many chalk streams across the country are in poor condition and all face a range of threats: over-extraction, pollution, invasive species, habitat degradation, and climate change.

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"...a babbling procession of the best stories in the world, sent from the heart of the earth..."
The Wind in the Willows, Kenneth Grahame