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[Front page](#)[News](#)[Feature articles](#)[Comedy](#)[Literature and poetry](#)[Music guide](#)[Theatre and plays](#)[Dance](#)[Visual arts films and photography](#)[Help](#)[Search](#)[Blog](#)**In this section**[Festival dates 2012](#)[Festivals 2011](#)[Festival reports 2011](#)[Festival reports 2010](#)[Festival reports 2009](#)[Download festival 2011](#)[Magazine contents](#)

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Feature: Download Festival 2011

This page is part of the the [festivals section](#)

Download Festival, Castle Donnington, 2011

As our mud-caked boots dry out, we begin our coverage of the 2011 Download festival. Come back soon for more coverage of the event. New material will be added daily during the week beginning 13th June.

With a small team on site we could not cover all the acts performing at the festival but this page offers our selection of those that we did see. All written reviews were made as we saw the acts play.

Second edition: 14th June

Who we saw

AlterBridge main stage Friday
 Bowling For Soup main stage Sunday
 Bring Me The Horizon second stage Friday
 Chthonic second stage Saturday
 The Cult second stage Sunday
 The Darkness main stage Friday
 Deaf Havana pepsi stage Sunday
 Def Leppard main stage Friday
 Evile pepsi stage Saturday
 Funeral For A Friend Pepsi stage Saturday
 Heights Red Bull stage Saturday
 Korn second stage Friday
 Lower Than Atlantis PepsiMax stage Friday
 Madina Lake main stage Sunday
 Maiden United jagermeister stage Saturday
 Mr Big second stage Saturday
 My Darkest Days pepsi stage Sunday
 Pendulum second stage Friday
 Puddle of Mudd (almost) main stage Friday
 Rise To Remain second stage Saturday
 Skindred main stage Saturday
 Skunk Anansie main stage Saturday
 Straight Line Stitch pepsi stage Saturday
 Sworn Amongst pepsi stage Sunday
 System Of A Down main stage Saturday
 Thin Lizzy main stage Friday
 Twisted Sister second stage Saturday
 You And What Army? Red Bull stage Sunday

Unknown band RedBull Tent, 17.20, Friday

Come back for photos, videos and reviews on all the above bands.

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Download was massive, in pretty much every sense. For us it was an event on a pretty large scale. We saw some bands we had not seen for a long time, some we had not seen before and discovered a few new one which we would like to see again.

Alterbridge



Alterbridge on the main stage on Friday

Several people had told me about Florida band **Alterbridge** and recommended that I listen to their tracks, which I did. So when I saw they were on the lineup, I made sure I didn't miss their set. So, it was a great experience to see them on the main stage and as they got into their songs, a forest of horns went up in front of the stage.

It was a set that fizzed with good sounds, heavy, yet melodic. This magnificent band produced a set of throbbing ear pleasers to a massive crowd. "It's a good day to be alive, that's for sure", shouts lead singer and guitarist Myles Kennedy and a huge cheer erupts from the packed crowd at the front. Yes, I echoed that as I stood there watching them.

They are a defining band in the history of progressive metal, a musicians' choice by all accounts. AlterBridge have recently announced that they will be returning to the UK in November for an arena tour with Black Stone Cherry and Theory Of A Deadman as support.

See our video of [Alterbridge playing at Download 2011](#) | [Find out more about Alterbridge](#)

The Darkness



The Darkness on stage on Friday

Suffolk hard rockers **The Darkness** have been around since the turn of the milenium but

split for five years. It was in March that the band announced they were re-forming and are planning to release a new album. Their set of classic rock inspired songs attracted a large slice of festival-goers to their pre-headline slot on the main stage on Friday. Singer Justine Hawkins said that being offered a slot at Download was "just too good to turn down."

See our video of [The Darkness playing on the main stage at Download 2011](#).

Skindred

Playing on the main stage on Saturday at 2 p.m., **Skindred** were billed as 'ragga metal', a combination of metal, punk and reggae. Now that sounded good to me and I had much about them from my rock friends, I had to make sure I saw them. So, a bit like RATM then? No, not really, much more fun and a totally different take on the interface between metal and Afro sounds. I'd call it hip-hop metal.

Someone said 'Ozzy Osborne visits Bob Marley', so, yea, I got that. They launched into a stamping intro and the crowd stood to attention. The lead vocalist stomped about the stage dressed in a union jack and wearing a top hat, while one of the guitarists seemed to be wearing a white tie and tail suit. A salute to *more British than the British* may be.

The songs swayed back and forth between heavy metal riffs and a kind of rasta rap before dropping into a bit of hair twirling, head banging beats. So one minute the crowd were skanking, then they were bouncing, then they were head banging, it was a busy session for them. At one point he urged the throng to take off one item of clothing and engage in what he called *The Newport Helicopter*. so several thousand t-shirts came off, together with a variety of other articles of attire. At the start of the next song, everyone was invited to twirl their item of clothing around their heads, helicopter-fashion. It was an incredible sight: thousands of t's gyrating over people's heads.

The dreadlocked lead singer was a real entertainer with a wicked line in patter between numbers; in his Welsh accent, he came out with some top lines that brought guffaws from the crowd, me included. Some of the songs got the crowd skanking in their wellies when not raising their horns to the stage. Now, that's unusual!

A hugely fun interlude in a day that could otherwise have been as sombre as the grey clouds that dominated the sky.

Great to hear something totally different.

[Video of Skindred playing the main stage on Saturday](#)

Def Leppard

The headline slot on the main stage on Friday went to Sheffield rockers **Def Leppard**. Nice to see that some of our legendary UK bands were headlining as well as the American block busters. Their production supplied a spectacular backdrop to the songs.

See our [video of Def Leppard performing on the main stage](#).

System of a Down



The American-Californian blockbusting giants **SOAD** took to the main stage to bring Saturday's awe-packed lineup to a close, in front of a crowd of inestimable volume. Now this is a band that I *did* definitely see at Reading 2001. On the basis of that I went out and purchased their 2001 album *Toxicity* and later their 2005 *Mesmerise*. So I was able to join in with a lot of the songs along with several thousand other people.



A massive crowd gathered for System of a Down on Saturday evening.

I didn't get there from the start of their set as I was watching Welsh rockers **Funeral for a Friend** playing in the PepsiMax stage. I saw them in Leicester recently and became a fan so I sacrificed a bit of SOAD time for them. Which weakest link decided to programme FFAF to start playing at the same time as SOAD?

I was a bit puzzled as I walked over to the main stage; I could see a huge curtain hanging

down the front of the stage. I needn't have rushed because they started late. The huge curtain dropped to the stage and an ear-bleeding roar went up from the crowd. There is no mistaking the unbounded enthusiasm of 50,000 rock fans in full throat. They started with Toxicity's open track *Prison Song* with its iconic lyrics "I buy my crack, my smack, my bitch, right here in Hollywood."

This sums up what the experience of a big rock festival is all about.

See the [opening song of SOAD](#) courtesy of Jason.

The Second Stage

Korn



Korn! Like Linkin Park and SOAD, one of the iconic bands of the festival. The already big crowd in front of the second stage got bigger. Even though I got there early and found myself a fairly good pitch near to the front, I soon found myself scrambling for the edge, as the pack got denser. As the programme notes warned: 'When Davis screams "Are you ready?", prepare to loose your pint.' I didn't have a pint but stood to loose more than that if I had stayed there.

Sounding distinctly different from what we had heard so far, there is no mistaking that characteristic sound of rocket powered, Californian nu-metal. The drummer was lost in a thicket of huge cymbals. Noticed Jonathan Davis wearing a kilt. The first couple of songs were slow, moody numbers before the set built up into a hair-raisingly big pounding sound. The crowd began singing along until the tune explodes into a great head banging crescendo. You don't just listen to a band like this; you experience them, and, wow, what an experience!



I thought I saw them live for the first time at Reading, ten years ago but I have a feeling they didn't turn up. They were one of the bands that defined rock for me in those days. In the somewhat cold afternoon, the crowd at the front were so densely packed you could see a heat haze rising from them. It was like they had created their own micro-climate. It was a great sea of humanity that covered every available square inch of field.

Pendulum

Second Stage, Friday 10th, from 21:35

Stage production at Download varies according to which act you are seeing but **Pendulum** pulled out a lot of stops for their show. They had even put up their own stage on top of the main stage area, with its video production screen at the front. Lots of flashing and scintillating lights and red washes illuminating the smoke pouring from the front of stage.

As dusk waned into darkness the stage show came alive and you feel feel the party atmosphere dropping into the crowd. Even though some of the crowd had gone to see Def Leppard, a sizeable body of fans crowded into the front of stage area with legions of people standing on the hill behind them, some of whom could not resist a bit of a dance where they had the space to do so.

Great big resounding sounds with the hallmark electro backing. Exciting, high energy stuff, if you have seen these guys in action before, you will know what we mean. It's rock with an urban feel, importing strong sounds and beats from the club scene. Great swathes of synth and keyboard work whirlpooling into the guitars and drums.

At one point, lead vocalist ... got the whole crowd to crouch down and when the music burst out after a break, thousands of people jumped up. A spot of light rain went un-noticed as the crowd were totally drawn in and mesmerised by the amazing music.

Our view:

The highlight of today's sets and certainly one of the most magical moments of the whole festival. We loved the music and the exciting production. It was a climactic conclusion to a day of really fine music.

See our video of [Pendulum playing on friday night at Download 2011](#).

Rise To Remain



The PepsiMax stage



My Darkest Days

Canadian rockers **My Darkest Days** played on the PepsiMax stage on Sunday.

See the video of [My Darkest Days](#)

The Red Bull Bedroom



We discovered some exciting new bands at the RedBull marquee stage

Heights



Hertfordshire band **Heights** on stage in the Red Bull marquee.

I happened to be in the Red Bull stage on Saturday at 3 p.m. A young band called **Heights** came on stage. I stuck around because I thought they were rather good. Right from the start of their set they went crazy and the lead singer dived into the crowd which, luckily was dense enough to catch him for a spot of crowd surfing.

Their set of pounding, progressive hardcore songs was packed with energy and their time on stage set off to a flying start. They certainly knew how to pump out some big rolling sounds. Although they began with a fair sized crowd, as they got into their set, the kids starting rolling into the tent to find out what was going on and it ended up pretty full of cheering teenagers. Bristling with megawatts of energy, their beat-laden songs and acrobatic stage antics were worth a silver medal for high jumping and I for one thought, yes, good, in fact, very good.

A bit later on that afternoon, I bumped into them in the VIP area and discovered that in fact we all knew each other. They played in Leicester a while back when they were called **2 Feet Wide** and I wrote a few nice things about them in my review of their gig at the Shed. So here they are (most of them):



Thom, Green, Hutton, Dean and Moley - **Heights** - keep an eye on them. They could make it! [Check 'em out.](#)

Bedroom Jam Winner



We saw this band and they were good. But the programme didn't say what their name was.

It's really good that [Bedroom Jam](#) gave a chance for newbie bands to play at Download.

The Jagermeister Acoustic Stage

Video of [Maiden United playing on Saturday 11th June](#)

Festival round up



Sunday at Download

Just in case you think we've never been to a British festival before, our round up will look at the whole five day experience of going to this mammoth event and no we won't dwell too much on the downsides.

With 70,000 people on site, the ninth Download Festival was a massive event. Over 100 bands took to five different stages and despite it having a reputation of being a fair for metalheads, there was in fact quite a variety of music styles, if you fancied a bit of a mixture.

The great British weather gave us its usual bash of 'summer' climate and while Friday and Saturday were more or less ok, a really cold wet front swept across the country on Sunday. Festival fans are tough bunnies and it would take more than a few light showers to dampen *their* spirits.

The main stages saw a prestigious lineup of bands both from the UK and across the pond. Having reunited earlier this year, The Darkness put on a storming set on Friday night. With System of a Down (making a reunion come-back after five years), Korn, Linkin Park and Pendulum on the bill, it was an event not to be missed for many rock devotees.

We were delighted that Red Bull and Bedroom Jam has given opportunities to small, unsigned, new bands to play at this festival. In common with The Rising Stage at Glastonbury, we salute the big festivals for nurturing new talent we definitely made some discoveries in the big red tent.

Just being present at an event of this size is daunting, though, we suspect, an awful lot of the crowd had been there before and will be going to Leeds, Reading, Glastonbury, etc. later in the year.

We were impressed by the level of organisation, the marshalling of huge numbers of (well-oiled) revelers was something to see, with vast armies of people marching to and from the arena and the campsites and the pick-up points, it was all carried out with ruthless efficiency. Going to a site of this size is demanding: it took us over 25 mins on the first day just to get from the site's main road entrance through to the box office. On the way in I could hear **Puddle of Mudd** playing on the main stage. Sounded really good; pity I wasn't there in time. To walk from one band in the PepsiMax stage to see a band in the Red Bull tent could take anything up to 20 minutes.

Arrival on Friday it took me the best part of an hour just to find out where all the stages were as well food stalls, merch shops, toilets and so on. A lot of time on site was devoted to inspecting programmes and checking up on bands. I got the very helpful lanyard of timetable cards to hang round my neck and the printed brochure with some jolly useful notes about the acts I didn't know much about.



The teepee village

In the VIP area a large number of inter-connecting Teepee tents provided food and refreshments for the large number of press, media, artists, crew and assorted personages. A welcome respite from the wind and rain on the inside and a nice place to chill out on the grass when the weather permitted.



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