

Britain in Bloom South West Best Park / Country Park 2014

Troopers Hill Local Nature Reserve

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Troopers Hill is a Local Nature Reserve in St George, east Bristol, extending over 21 acres (8.4 hectares) of acid heath and grassland on a pennant sandstone hillside overlooking the River Avon. This wild and romantic site supports rare plants and wildlife and provides local people with a space for relaxation and recreation.

This document takes the Britain in Bloom Parks and Open Spaces Assessment criteria and gives evidence of how those criteria are met by Troopers Hill Local Nature Reserve.

1. Community

In the 10 years of Friends of Troopers Hill's existence we have held over 100 events, excluding work parties, raised over £100,000 for works and activities on Troopers Hill. This made the site attractive for further investment such as Bristol City Council, the landowner, investing resources to bring the site to a Green Flag standard and allocating a Community Park keeper for 2 days per week.

The Friends hold 8 meetings a year, locally advertised and open to all, to discuss plans for the future and review what has been done. They work very closely with the landowners, Bristol City Council. One of the Friends' first actions was to create a management plan for the site and have a formal signing ceremony with the then head of Bristol Parks. This went on to be the annually reviewed 5 year management plan used today and shows clearly tasks owned by the Friends and those that are the responsibility of Bristol City Council.

A free quarterly newsletter "The Hill" www.troopers-hill.org.uk/newsletter.htm is published and distributed to 400 members, an annual leaflet of Troopers Hill's events is published each winter, the Friends of Troopers Hill maintain an informative and regularly updated website www.troopers-hill.org.uk plus "troopershill" Twitter and Facebook pages. Minutes of all meetings are published on the website and linked to Twitter and Facebook. Leaflets about Troopers Hill are distributed at local public events www.troopers-hill.org.uk/leaflets/index.htm and at Hill events. The Friends also make use of display boards at events to showcase aspects of the Hill and the activities there. There are clip frames on welcoming signs at the Hill's entrances that are used to promote forthcoming events and activities.

A record of all volunteer work parties on Troopers Hill is maintained on www.troopers-hill.org.uk/workp.htm and links are posted on Facebook and Twitter. The work parties are held monthly and children accompanied by responsible adults are particularly welcome. The drinks and biscuits time at the end of a work party are another opportunity for sharing news and feedback on possible plans.

Details of all projects are recorded on the Troopers Hill website. The largest project undertaken, the Stepping Forward project, £36,000 of Big Lottery Community Spaces funding to improve access to the site is reported on www.troopers-hill.org.uk/steppingforward/. A timeline of the project from 2010 to 2012 is on www.troopers-hill.org.uk/steppingforward/SFtimeline.pdf. Consultation with the local community is always high on the Friends' agenda before any project and they encourage and support the landowners, Bristol City Council to do this as well.

Our current project, addressing dog fouling and dog control, is heavily dependent on local people's input, for a successful solution. Feedback, so far, has been good.

www.troopers-hill.org.uk/cleanup.

Sources of all our funding, which is mainly from grants raised for individual projects but also from local businesses and individual donations is listed on www.troopers-hill.org.uk/grants.htm

Our free events are made as varied as possible to appeal to many tastes while always carrying the message of the importance of the site and the need to care for it. These range from guided walks, "Bugs and Beasties hunts" with naturalists to identify the finds, to looking at the night skies with the Bristol Astronomical society and open air picnics with a band providing music. Details of future and records of all our previous events can be accessed via

<http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/events.htm>.

Links have been established with local schools resulting in the "Fun Learning Trails" and many visits self-managed by the schools www.troopers-hill.org.uk/FunLearning/.

We are particularly proud of our audio trail, put together by our volunteer Kit Elliott, a professional cameraman and sound recordist, which makes Troopers Hill come alive even to those who cannot visit it or see it. The accessibility of Troopers Hill, by virtue of its rugged nature, is limited but is to the level approved of by the Bristol Physical Access Chain, a local group who assess accessibility. We were delighted to follow their suggestions to improve and add to signage along the wheelchair accessible route.

Details of all Troopers Hill trails, which also include a tree trail and a woodland trail, can be downloaded via www.troopers-hill.org.uk/trails.

Our group has been awarded a level of "Outstanding" in the RHS "It's Your Neighbourhood" scheme 2012 and 2013. A summary of our achievements on Troopers Hill this year, 2014, is included in the document produced for the judge of that scheme. This can be read on <http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/achievements2014.pdf>. It also includes the aims of our group and our achievements since we started.

2. Maintenance and Development

All work on Troopers Hill follows the 5-year management plan 2012-2017 www.troopers-hill.org.uk/plan.htm developed for the site by Bristol City Council in partnership with Friends of Troopers Hill. This plan is reviewed annually. This plan links to the relevant sections of the UK and Bristol Biodiversity Action Plans. The latter is supported by bodies including Bristol City Council, Avon Wildlife Trust and Natural England. Regular photographic and species surveys are funded by Bristol Parks and ourselves, and/or are performed by students as part of their studies. The site has achieved Green Flag status each year from 2007/8 to 2013/14 (Bristol City Council has not applied for any Green Flags in 2014/15, having no staff resource to support the process).

In accordance with the Management Plan maintenance of the site aims to balance the use of the site for recreation while protecting its natural beauty and its diversity. For example, while vegetation is cut back from paths to keep them clear this not carried out too vigorously and it is accepted that occasionally visitors may have to brush past taller vegetation. The aim is for the site to be accessible but to look natural.

Work is needed on the south-east boundary fencing and entrances to prevent future motorcycle access. Plans have been drawn up to remodel the south entrance using an earlier grant and funding will be sought next year. <http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/plan/EntranceF.pdf>. Plans include a base for a cherry picker to carry out maintenance, as needed, on the listed structure, a chimney from an engine house associated with coalmining, at that entrance.

3. Environment



Litter and dog waste bins on the site are emptied twice weekly by the Community Park Keeper. Much litter is picked up by visitors to the Hill, particularly dog walkers. Some litter picking is done by the Community Park Keeper, some by the Friends. The Friends dispose of cuttings from work parties either at concealed location onsite or place the cuttings in one ton sacks for collection by the Community Park Keeper at contractors' entrances.

Graffiti is addressed promptly but is rare. Police are advised. The Friends have graffiti removal spray provide by the Community Park keeper so we do not have to wait for his next visit if it is a simple task. Where it is more complex we use Bristol City Council's online graffiti reporting system where usually graffiti is removed within 3 working days.

As a Local Nature Reserve the amount of "furniture"/clutter has to be limited to be in keeping with the site. Much feedback on this subject has been received by the Friends. There are welcoming signs on every entrance and a number of interpretation boards. Up to date leaflets on the history, geology, wildlife and events of the site are available in paper and electronic form. Seating is available at the top of each path's steep section.


Dog waste is an issue on the site. Routes across the site were cleared of dog waste, by hand, by volunteers and a council officer, earlier this year. Numbers of deposits counted and then new deposits counted and spray painted different colours over the next 3 days. This was reported to visitors via various means and in response to feedback we also weighed deposits in bins to find out what proportion of dog waste is not picked up. This gave the disappointing result that a third of dog waste is not picked up. This led to our campaign for this year, see www.troopers-hill.org.uk/cleanup gaining people's feedback for a solution. A further audit will take place soon and suggestions such as free dog training taster classes on Troopers Hill will be followed up.

An interpretation board that is not on the judge's route



Welcome to Troopers Hill

Marbled white



A Haven for Wildlife

The purple heather and yellow broom of Troopers Hill Local Nature Reserve is unique in Bristol. The heathland and acid grassland form a very special habitat, particularly for invertebrates. The Hill is managed to protect this unique environment.

Shaped by Its Past

On a 1610 map of Kingswood Forest the Hill was shown by its older name of Harris Hill. The landscape on the Hill then would have been very different from its appearance today. Over the years, the Hill was extensively quarried for Pennant Sandstone which was used for building. From deeper underground, miners took coal and fireclay.

The Chimney

in front of you is a relic of Troopers Hill Colliery which operated in the early 1800s. This chimney formed part of an Engine House like the one shown in Loxton's drawing, which was further up Troopers Hill Road. The colliery had two shafts, this helped with ventilation – one for updraft the other for downdraft.

The Engine Houses contained steam engines or "Fire Engines" for hauling up the coal and pumping water out of the mine.

Woodland Trail

The landscape of part of the Hill was changed again in the 1960s and early 1970s when the area to the west, which is now woodland, was used to tip building rubble. As you follow the path up the Hill look out for the carved marker post that shows the start of the Woodland Trail which will take you on a circuit through this quiet woodland where, if you are lucky, you might catch a glimpse of a roe deer.


A Space for Everyone

We hope you enjoy exploring Troopers Hill today. Please respect this special place; take your litter home, clean up after your dog and protect the Hill's delicate grassland by not using barbecues.


Find out more

Please contact:
Bristol Parks www.bristol.gov.uk/parks
T: 0117 922 3719
Friends of Troopers Hill
www.troopers-hill.org.uk
Download an Audio Tour of Troopers Hill from www.troopers-hill.org.uk/audio

Illustrations: Common blue, Yellow broom, Roe deer (female), Bell heather, Long winged conehead cricket










Loxton's drawing of Troopers Hill Road, about 1914.
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From a 1610 map of Kingswood Forest.
© By kind permission of Bristol Record Office.

1700s Recycling

The black blocks used in the chimney are made from copper slag. This was waste produced from copper smelting. There were 49 copper smelting furnaces recorded at Crews Hole in 1754 using local coal and copper ore brought by river. The Black Castle in Brislington was built from the same blocks.



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A fascinating mix of history and wildlife on your doorstep

A recent event - Music on the Hill with the Ambling Band - 21st June



Work Party of Saturday 5th July

| 2012 Management Plan Objectives for this work party | | Compartment |
|---|--|-------------|
| 6.2.2.4 | Prevent spread of gorse and begin cutting on a rotational plan to encourage regeneration, reduce the fire risk and prevent it becoming old and degenerate. | 5 |
| 6.2.2.7 | Eradicate Bracken or at least reduce it to a minimum apart from in scrub at boundaries. | 4, 5 & 8 |
| 6.2.10.2 | Cut back vegetation adjacent to and overhanging footpaths and entrances. | 6 |
| 6.2.10.8 | Maintain raised bed at entrance C for road safety to prevent pedestrians crossing close to junction of Greendown and Troopers Hill Road. | 6 |





This large skipper brought the number of species of butterfly found on Troopers to 23 in June 2014

Lichen and fungi to be found on Troopers Hill - we are prouder of our waxcaps but the fly agaric does make a striking image



Plus the odd reptile - a common lizard that supervised a work party

