

Friends of Troopers Hill - It's Your Neighbourhood 2016

1. Aims of the Project

Troopers Hill is a Local Nature Reserve 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. Friends of Troopers Hill is a community conservation group of primarily local residents, formed in December 2003 to:

- provide a friendly community focus for people who care about Troopers Hill
- undertake practical conservation tasks
- organise public events, including walks and talks
- work with Bristol City Council Parks department to ensure Troopers Hill is properly managed.

Our constitution is at <http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/constitutionF.pdf>

2. Achievements since the IYN judging of 2015

In addition to our usual activities (see section 3), we have:

- 1) Followed up last year's survey that proved a play area was wanted by local people, with a design consultation. A design brief was written by our Chair and used to obtain designs and quotes from play suppliers. Friends of Troopers Hill then succeeded in applying for over £80,000 in grant funding. A tender process has been carried out, a supplier selected and the new play area will be in place, at the latest, by November.
- 2) Paid for an informal path to be improved in Troopers Hill Woodland to give access from Crews Hole Rd. Work was done by young people being trained in park related skills to help them into employment under the local ParkWork scheme.
- 3) Worked with the Bristol Astronomical Society who provided yet another fascinating free star gazing event on Troopers Hill in February and also helped with a successful application for Troopers Hill to be designated a Dark Sky Discovery Site, a national designation identifying places that are good for the public to visit to look at the night sky.
- 4) Identified locations for 7 more trees to be planted on Troopers Hill as part of Bristol's One Tree Per Child project. The planting was enthusiastically carried out by children from Air Balloon Hill Primary School.
- 5) Given a talk and PowerPoint show to Summerhill Academy year 3 children to support the visit they had taken with teachers to Troopers Hill to learn more of its history, geology and ecology. We also taught a group of local Brownies compass skills using Troopers Hill's Fun Learning Trails.
- 6) Arranged for offenders working their community service hours under the Community Payback scheme to come to Troopers Hill to carry out work to control the spread of broom and gorse.
- 7) Run a very successful Family Fun Dog Show to encourage responsible dog ownership.
- 8) Succeeded in obtaining a £1,000 grant to be used to create a geological interpretation board.
- 9) Welcomed another visit from geography students from Bridgwater College. Troopers Hill features in a Geography 'A' level textbook they use.
- 10) Contributed to Bristol City Council's consultation on bye-laws and encouraged others to do so. Bye-laws that add to the protection of our green spaces. Troopers Hill is at particular risk from fire, often linked to BBQs. Bye-laws would enable the use of BBQs to be forbidden on this land.

3. What we have achieved since we started

In December 2003 paths were obscured under vegetation, large quantities of litter had accumulated, and, most importantly, scrub was invading the acid grass and heathland that justifies the Local Nature Reserve classification. Maintenance visits took place only for brief periods every 6-8 weeks.

Now the site is well managed according to an annually updated 5-year management plan

<http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/plan.htm> agreed with Bristol City Council. 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.

The site has achieved Green Flag status each year from 2007/8 to 2013/14. Bristol City Council no longer has staff resource to support the process so in 2014 we entered the Britain in Bloom South West Parks and Open Spaces scheme and received a gold award. In 2015 Troopers Hill was given the top level, 5 stars, Pride in Parks award by Britain in Bloom South West.

We organise monthly Saturday work parties and some Sunday ones, mainly addressing encroaching scrub and litter picking. Bristol City Council undertake machine-based maintenance, while Friends of Troopers Hill continue with manual tasks that would not otherwise be practicable, e.g. removing brambles growing in and around broom plants, and pulling out bracken amongst the heather, etc. Over 50 different local people have volunteered at our work parties.

In 2006, to preserve a boundary, 20 volunteers planted an 80-metre hedge of native species. Local residents were consulted about hedge management: the majority favoured cutting over hedge-laying. Volunteers hand-pruned the hedge annually until December 2012 when it was sufficiently mature for an annual flail cut by Bristol City Council.

We have 499 members on our free membership list, 793 Facebook 'friends' and 611 Twitter followers. We maintain an informative and regularly updated web site www.troopers-hill.org.uk and publish a newsletter 3 or 4 times a year which is, for the most part, either e-mailed or hand-delivered to recipients. The website is often a first point of contact for students seeking further information about Troopers Hill.

Notices and details of all the activities are posted on the site. Our meetings are open to all. We focus our publicity locally, encouraging people to walk, cycle or use the bus.

We are proud to have founded a Walking for Health group, the St George Strollers, which celebrated its 5th anniversary in May. The Strollers celebrated their 120th walk on Monday 13th July. More than 126 people have attended these walks.

In addition to work parties and regular meetings, we have organised over 126 free public events since 2004, including guided nature, history and geology walks, concerts, dog shows, tai chi classes, star gazing and craft activities for children and families.

Since 2003 Friends of Troopers Hill have raised over £180,000 for different projects. We work closely with Bristol Parks, are members of the Bristol Parks Forum, and are represented on the St George Neighbourhood Partnership.

Troopers Hill is a venue for educational visits by primary school and 'A' level pupils. The site provides study material for University undergraduates and Ph D students.

In July, 2015, David Notton, Senior Curator (Hymenoptera) for London's Natural History Museum wrote, "it was great to visit a site which is so obviously valued and actively conserved".

4. What we are aiming for in the future

We will continue with conservation work and promoting Troopers Hill, particularly via events. We aim to attract new members from the local community who will contribute to the care and promotion of the Local Nature Reserve. Better dog control and reducing dog fouling will remain a priority.

We have taken the first step in seeking funding improving the existing wheelchair access route to Troopers Hill and replacing deteriorating wooden fencing and gates to keep out motorbikes. These issues are now part of the Neighbourhood Priorities for St George. This gives us access to some local funds to attract other funding. We will pick this up again after the new play area is installed at the end of this year.

We predict that continuing resource cuts to Bristol Parks staffing and services will present a challenge for the years ahead.

Friends of Troopers Hill have raised over £80,000 to pay for this new play area



Conservation Work Party of Sunday 16th August, 2015

2012 Management Plan Objectives for this work party		Compartment
6.2.2.7	Eradicate Bracken or at least reduce it to a minimum apart from in scrub at boundaries.	5
6.2.2.9	Removal of all tree seedlings from grassland and heathland	5
6.2.2.10	Control bramble and scrub encroaching onto grassland and heathland	5
6.2.2.11	Manage to maintain some areas of heath type scrub with broom	5





The ashy mining bee (*Andrena cineraria*) is regularly recorded on Troopers Hill. Photo taken April 2015. This bee has a cleptoparasite *Nomada lathburiana* which is also regularly recorded on this site.

Lichen and fungi are 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



Family Fun Dog Show, October 2015



"Really nice to get together with other owners and their pets"



"Thank you for a great show and great day out! Spread the word"



"Fantastic friendly community event— thank you to all those involved who gave their time to organise this...."



"A lovely afternoon out and such a warm + welcoming atmosphere! The events at troopers Hill are fab!"



www.troopers-hill.org.uk



Proud ParkWork Team – June 2016

finishing work at the new entrance to the refurbished path from Crews Hole



Tree planting on Troopers Hill Field - February 2016



Troopers Hill Dark Sky Discovery Site

Troopers Hill has now been declared as a
"Orion Class" [Dark Sky Discovery Site](#).

Despite its location in the midst of brightly lit St George it is a good place to visit for star and planet watching, relatively protected from light pollution and with a good horizon.

Dark Sky Discovery Sites are places that:

- provide good sightlines of the sky
- are away from the worst of any local light pollution
- have good public access, including firm ground for wheelchairs and are generally freely accessible at all times.

"Orion" sites are those where the seven main stars in the winter constellation Orion are visible to the naked eye. Typically, this means away from, or shielded from, bright lights such as street lights, security lights or approaching car lights.

Visiting Troopers Hill for Star Gazing

Maps & directions to Troopers Hill

Star gazers should visit Troopers Hill via the wheelchair access route from Malvern Road, use torches and either keep to the wheelchair access path or keep north and west of the chimney on the fairly flat area of turf nearby. As Troopers Hill is an exposed hillside, layers of warm, windproof clothing including head covering are advised.

The best observing site is near the chimney on top of the hill where you are above the City's lights.

The Hill is in a residential area, please consider our neighbours and keep noise to a minimum, especially if visiting late at night or early morning.

