

Britain in Bloom South West Pride in Parks Award 2016

Troopers Hill Local Nature Reserve

Author: Susan Acton-Campbell, Chair, Friends of Troopers Hill, 7th January, 2016

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 South West 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 12 years of Friends of Troopers Hill's existence we have held over 120 events, excluding conservation 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 6 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 over 500 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.

Two experimental work parties carried out on Sundays in 2015 showed that it was a more attractive day to families than the usual Saturday conservation work parties. The second work party was particularly successful. www.troopers-hill.org.uk/workp.htm#16aug15

As a result 3 Sunday work parties have been planned for 2016 with tasks that would be attractive to family groups. The monthly Saturday work parties will also continue.

The role of Community Park Keeper disappeared within Bristol City Council towards the end of 2014. The Friends of Troopers Hill have worked closely with the Parks team to ensure that good

quality maintenance has continued, following the Site Management Plan, under the new structure. We are extremely pleased with the provision of resource in these difficult times.

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 main project, to provide a children's play area on the flat playing field at the top of Troopers Hill, has attracted a lot of local support. Grant applications have been made for £75,000. We will know whether our applications have been successful in early March 2016. More details of the project can be found on www.troopers-hill.org.uk/play/. While this is not actually in the Local Nature Reserve we hope that this added attraction on an adjacent site will encourage people to stay longer and enjoy more of the area including the Local Nature Reserve.

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>.

We are delighted to say that the site has recently been awarded a "Dark Sky Discovery Site" designation www.troopers-hill.org.uk/DarkSky/ meaning that this is a good place to visit for star and planet watching, relatively protected from light pollution and with a good horizon.

Links have been established with local primary schools resulting in the "Fun Learning Trails" so many visits can be self-managed by schools www.troopers-hill.org.uk/FunLearning/. We were particular pleased this year to be visited by a secondary school, the Metropolitan Academy, and hope links with secondary schools can be increased. A report of the visit is on <http://tinyurl.com/jsbendp>

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.

We have recently further improved access to Troopers Hill by using a donation from a local business, Beeses Riverside Bar and Tea Gardens, to pay for materials to add steps to a path leading from an informal parking area on Crews Hole Rd to the woodland adjacent to the Local Nature Reserve. The work has been done by young people participating in the ParkWork project www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/parkwork/.

Our group has been awarded a level of "Outstanding" in the RHS "It's Your Neighbourhood" scheme for the years 2012-15. A summary of our aims and achievements on Troopers Hill for the year summer 2014- summer 2015, produced for the IYN judge can be read on www.troopers-hill.org.uk/achievements2015.pdf.

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 when Bristol City Council stopped applying as they had 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 is 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.

We have been particularly pleased to not only have Parks staff and our volunteers carrying our conservation management work on Troopers but also Community Payback teams. Offenders have been particularly useful in clearing part of a large area of gorse.

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 we will do more when we finish our play area project. 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 Parks staff. Much litter is picked up by visitors to the Hill, particularly dog walkers. Other litter picking is done by Parks staff and the Friends. Cuttings from work parties are either concealed at location onsite or placed in one ton sacks for collection by Parks staff at contractors' entrances.

We were delighted to add a dog waste bin to the site during 2015, in according with our management plan, so that now all entrances have a dog waste bin.

Graffiti is addressed promptly but is rare. Police are advised. The Friends have graffiti removal spray provided by the Parks Department so we do not have to wait for Council staff to attend 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, a view supported by local people. 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. Seats are available at the top of each section of steep path.

In common with most green spaces dog fouling and dog control, is an issue but a recent audit carried out by our volunteers actually shows the Local Nature Reserve itself has low levels of dog fouling, although a footpath in adjacent woodland is a "hot spot". We encourage good owner behaviour through signage, Facebook and Twitter postings and staged a 2015 Family Fun Dog Show at which we gave out free dog waste bags. We have worked with Bristol City Council's Dog Warden. One issue is that at least one visitor does slash signs with responsible dog ownership messages. We cannot afford to replace signage daily but remove remains as quickly as possible and replace at monthly work parties. More on www.troopers-hill.org.uk/clearUp/.


Good news gathered while going round paint spraying dog poo piles during our audit is that a number of dog owners not only pick up their own dog waste but other people's dog waste too.

Our group is proud that Troopers Hill was one of the sites visited in 2015 by David Notton, Senior Curator, Hymenoptera, of London's Natural History Museum, to collect bee specimens to create a DNA database for speedy identification of bee species. He identified 4 species that had not previously been recorded on Troopers Hill so as a result we now know the Hill provides a habitat for at least 77 bee species. He wrote, "It was great to visit a site which is so obviously valued and actively conserved".

One of Troopers Hill's interpretation boards



Welcome to Troopers Hill



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.

A Nature Reserve shaped by Industrial History



"They have built a steam-engine for raising coal on a spot, which we used to think quiet and pleasant; and where, until then we could gather woodbine and blue violets."

Elizabeth Emra 1831



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.

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

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A fascinating mix of history and wildlife on your doorstep

Music on the Hill with the Fantasy Orchestra - 27th June 2015



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 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

