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The Friends of Troopers Hill



Spring 2012



We have recently had several comments from local residents about what they see as unwarranted "clearance" on Troopers Hill. Hence I am delighted that we have an article from Jan Walters, our local Nature Conservation Officer, explaining the importance of maintaining the balance on the Hill. We really cannot say this often enough, but when you convey these comments to us, we always pass them on to the Parks Department who actually own the Hill, so that they are aware of your opinions. It has to be said though that all work carried out is aimed precisely at enabling the gorse, heather and broom (to name just three) that you value on TH to continue to thrive and most definitely not to destroy it. You may be interested to read further (and independent) information on this subject here: <http://www3.hants.gov.uk/biodiversity/heathland/heathland-management.htm>

You will also have seen the recent posters around the Hill aimed at dog owners who do not clean up after their dogs. We thought it might be nice to hear from the BCC Dog Wardens on this and other issues as they are heavily concerned with this problem. You can read more about them inside.

Saturday March 24th sees the (now) annual St George Community Fair coming around again. It takes place at St Aidans and St George, Firtree Lane, from 11 am to 2 pm. We'll be there, along with other local interests, and we'll be reporting on progress of the "Stepping Forward" grant work. See you there!

April will be a busy month for Friends. As well as supporting the Good Friday service (Friday 6th) we'll have a work party (Saturday 7th) and then we have our "Walkshops" based on TH Field for you to come and help design the signposts for the woodland paths (Sunday 8th). That is followed by a St George Strollers walk based around Kingswood Heritage Museum (Tuesday 10th) - you're very welcome to come and join us on that as well. Details in the diary.

Lastly, we're delighted to announce the return of the South Gloucestershire Youth Jazz Orchestra (SOGYO) for our Music on the Hill event this year. That takes place on Saturday June 16th, so put the date in your diary now. We carefully chose it so as not to clash with the Olympic Games — or anything else that we know about!

Keeping a Nature Reserve "Natural"

What an amazing place Troopers Hill is! You can see it for miles, with its distinctive mound, topped by the chimney, and glowing purple and yellow with heathers and gorse.

So, what makes this site so unique in Bristol? In a city where most of the distinctive landscape is based on limestone (of which the Avon Gorge is a magnificent example), Troopers Hill is not only made up largely of sandstone, but has been modified over the centuries by local industries, leading to further changes in the soil makeup. This has led to a different geology from almost anywhere else in the city. Essentially, many of the plants and associated animals are found nowhere else in the city (and some species, including invertebrates, are rare in the whole of the UK). Hence why this site has received local designation for its wildlife and geological value.

In order to conserve this unique value, the site needs to be sensitively managed, otherwise natural succession would lead to trees covering the whole site. While some would question why that would be a problem, we would lose the unique aspects of this site and, there are other fine woodland areas within our small city.

Likewise, planting flowers and trees has the potential to reduce the valuable wildlife areas of the site, both by direct impact and by potential spread of such species across the site. Look at the impact of Japanese Knotweed, for example, which was planted as an exciting new garden plant by the Victorians and now threatens many natural areas.

So, if you want to plant anything on the Hill, please ask yourself whether this is the appropriate place. Even 'wildflower mixes', so much in the news at present, should only be planted where a site has low wildlife value to start with, as there may well be seeds inappropriate to the ecology of the area. This is the approach which has been taken, for example, with the glorious 'nectar margins' which you may have seen planted around the city, e.g. along the M32 embankments.

Jan Walters, Nature Conservation Officer

It's a Dog (Warden)'s Life!

Since 2007, there have been three Dog Wardens for the whole of the City of Bristol. All have been Dog Wardens for many years



and gained a lot of experience on the job. Each Warden covers their own area - one third of the City. Having come from working with animals in their previous jobs, such as the Bristol Dogs and Cats Home and the

RSPCA, they have very good animal handling skills and enjoy working with dogs and all have dogs of their own.

Their job includes collecting stray dogs, investigating dangerous dog complaints, erecting signs on lamp posts and patrols of streets and Green Spaces, licence inspections for home boarders, pet shops and riding stables. Quite a list!

The Wardens say that the hardest part of their job is seeing a dog put to sleep. For example, if a stray dog has not been claimed after 7 days and it's not suitable for rehoming because it has serious health problems. The best part, however, is being able to reunite a lost dog with its owner — "We

understand that sometimes accidents happen and dogs escape and become lost. If a dog is found and is identified, it makes our job a lot easier."



Between April 2010 and April

2011, the Dog Wardens issued 24 Fixed Penalty Notices to dog owners for fouling and straying offences. Since April 2011 a total of 18 have been issued — "If a penalty notice is issued, the offender has 14 days to pay the £80 fine. Failure to pay the notice can lead to prosecution with a maximum penalty of £1000." So, it can be a costly affair not to clean up after your dog.

There seem to be two main complaints about dogs. The first is a question of control — "A dog which causes an unprovoked injury to another dog or member of the public is not under proper control." Apart from any action from the wardens, this can lead to an owner being sued.

The second, inevitably, relates to dog mess and the Dog Warden Service is receiving a high number of dog fouling complaints throughout the whole city, Troopers Hill being no exception -

Toxocariasis is an infestation of humans, usually children, with the larvae of *Toxocara canis*, a small threadlike worm that resides in a dog's intestine. A dog harbouring the small round worm has large numbers of worm eggs in its faeces, which can contaminate the soil or attach to shoes that tread in it."

Children who play with an infested dog or with soil contaminated with its faeces can inadvertently put their fingers in their mouths and swallow some of the worm eggs. The swallowed eggs hatch in the intestine of the child to liberate larvae, which travel towards their liver, lungs, brain and eyes. They can then trigger off allergic reactions such as asthma, and also have more serious effects such as blindness. There is generally a much greater risk of children coming into contact with *Toxocara* in public parks, where there is no guarantee that the dogs which are allowed to roam free there have all been wormed. Dog owners must regularly worm their dogs.

So what message would the Dog Wardens like to leave dog owners with if they could talk to them personally? - "Please be responsible and remember to carry plenty of poop scoop bags when walking your dogs in a public place. Not having a device to clean up after your dog, or failing to see your dog go to the toilet could result in being fined £80 or prosecution under The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act."



Stepping Forward - Latest News

Lots has been happening since December when we received the news that we were successful in our application for £30,000 from the Big Lottery Community Spaces Programme.



Behind the scenes we have been working with Vicki, our Project Manager at Bristol City Council, to get orders placed for various bits of work. Over the past few weeks things have really started to happen on the Hill itself.

The most important part of the project - the reason that we originally started the application in August 2010 - is to rebuild the various flights of steps on the hill. Work on these started at the end of February and is progressing around the hill. The work is being carried out by Classic Landscapes Ltd. Before they started we walked the site with their Managing Director and Rupert Higgins. Rupert is the ecologist who has carried out the regular photo monitoring of the hill since 1994. He pointed out the important areas of

CELEBRATE WITH THE ST GEORGE STROLLERS!

In May our healthy walking group, sponsored by Friends of Troopers Hill, will reach its first anniversary. It is lovely to be able to say that the group is thriving. We have 4 trained volunteer walk leaders, a newly joined assistant and a core group of regulars who walk with us come what may, rain, shine or even, just before Christmas, freezing hail! Our highest attendance so far was 29 people coming to an exploration of the Dings. That just topped an outing to Wick Golden Valley which ended with a pub lunch. Most of our walks have been circular but our walk on March 28th will buck that trend. We'll take a couple of busses to Snuff Mills and walk back to St George from there. Anyone who feels tempted, please join us at 10am at the Aldi car park, in Redfield.

Everyone is also welcome at our 1st Birthday

habitat on the hill and stressed the need to avoid damaging them.

The other work, that you may have noticed, is some scrub clearance along the paths through the woodland and also to the gorse on the hill. This work has been carried out by offenders on the 'Community Payback' scheme. We have been impressed by the amount of work that these teams have done in a day. It is certainly not a soft option for these offenders. The clearance of the gorse looks destructive, but it has spread very quickly over the past few years and needs to be controlled. We want to keep some gorse on the hill so, in accordance with the Management Plan, it is being cut on a rotational sequence to remove the old gorse and encourage regeneration.

The next part of the project will be the rebuilding of the steps down into the woods from the Field. This will be done by volunteers organised by BTCV starting just before Easter.

On Easter Sunday (8th April) there will be a chance to get involved in the production of waymarkers for the woodland trail. The artist who will be carving the posts will be holding 'walkshops' to get ideas from local residents to inspire the designs.

For more details of the project and photos of the work see www.troopers-hill.org.uk/steppingforward

Rob Acton-Campbell



walk on Troopers Hill. It's on Monday May 21st and we will be joined by local naturalist Ed Drewitt, who will give a talk on the wildlife of Bristol. That will be followed by celebratory refreshments at Summerhill Methodist Church. Meet at 10am, at the Summerhill Terrace entrance to Troopers Hill Field.

If you have a question, would like to be put on our mailing list, or would like to talk through whether or not these walks are suitable for you, please contact me - details in the contact panel.

Clare Willott

Jules's Diary

Hello Troopers,

So, Grace Teppford has put in a long promised personal appearance at last! From what I've seen an improvement has already been made and others are to follow no doubt, but probably more of her visit elsewhere in this missive.

Meanwhile the Parks' team's sterling work has continued to reclaim areas previously reclaimed, so to speak (or should that be so to write?). The usual late winter works continue on The Hill, though the seasons seem to disagree with the winter bit, both sun and temperature wise. They (the works not the seasons) seem to be bearing fruit, more grass, weaker bramble &c. This has caused some controversy and normally, being but a humble functionary, I wouldn't comment. However... the place is unique, within Bristol at least, and we would be derelict in our care to allow it to degenerate into just another area of bramble and scrub, there are plenty of those. The remedial works are done purely to prevent this happening, not to "parkify" the Hill. After all, just down the road there is a fine Victorian park in which to promenade should one desire to do so.

Despite all the above, The Hill remains the usual sanctuary from the cares of life, even when litter-picking (again many heartfelt thanks to those who anonymously assist). Half the world seems to be in some sort of turmoil, but The Hill just metaphorically shrugs (luckily not literally) and says "still here!"

I'm always slightly envious of the little coterie that gathers mid-morn to chat, throw balls for dogs and look at the view from the bench but I do get the opportunity to "stand and stare" occasionally. Well frequently if I'm honest, it's that sort of place. I get to throw the occasional ball too!

Cheers,

jules

ABC of Troopers Hill

L is for Lichen.

Troopers Hill is home, among other things, to an interesting range of lichens. Lichens are an interdependent combination of a fungus living with blue-green bacteria or algae. They may exist as discs or mottled areas on surfaces including tree trunks, branches, walls, and stones, as well as in the soil. Some take definite shapes such as miniature golf-tees, clubs or antlers. Different lichens may be black, white, grey, yellow or shades of green. Ecologically, they sometimes indicate how much or little pollution exists in the habitat. An example of a bright yellow lichen ([Psilolechia lucida](#)) is visible on the rocks in the Gully. To see it, stand with your back to Troopers Hill Road and look up and westwards to the vertical face of the wall where a patch looks as if it has been dusted with sulphur. One lichen ([Parmotrema perlatum](#)) living on stones on Troopers Hill belongs to a genus more usually found on trees in tropical surroundings.

Bryn Friallen

Dates for your Diary

Regular events:

Work Parties: Saturdays April 7th, May 5th, June 2nd and July 7th. 10am—midday. Meet at Troopers Hill Road and Greendown.

Meetings. Thursdays Mar 29th. and May 31st, 7.15pm, Summerhill Methodist Church, 5 Air Balloon Road. *Come along and share your views on our Local Nature Reserve.*

St George Strollers:

Mon 21st May: Birthday Walk. 10am. Summerhill Terrace entrance to the Field. *Celebrate our one year anniversary - join radio's wildlife expert, Ed Drewitt on Troopers Hill. Refreshments at Summerhill Methodist Church and a meeting to plan year 2. For further details on this and our other walks, contact Clare —see Contacts.*

Other events:

Saturday March 24th: St Aidan's Community Fair. 11am -2pm. *Come and see how the plans for the Troopers Hill Stepping Forward project are progressing.*

Friday April 6th: Good Friday Service on Troopers Hill. *Procession starts from Summerhill Methodist Church 11.30am.*

Sunday April 8th. Family "Walkshops". Focus on Nature 10am—1 pm, Focus on History 2 pm—4.30 pm. *Walk the woodland trail, then model in clay and draw your ideas for waymarkers on the Woodland Trail.*

Saturday 14th April. Dawn Chorus Walk. 6—7.30 am. *A guided walk to listen to bird song. Led by expert Ed Drewitt. Booking essential.*

Sunday May 20th. Tree Gazing Walk. 10.30 am-noon. *Walk through Troopers Hill Woods with tree expert Tony Titchen. Booking essential*

Saturday June 16th. Music on the Hill. 6pm on. *A summer evening on music on Troopers Hill. This year we will be serenaded by the excellent South Gloucester Youth Jazz Orchestra. Bring a picnic, but please do NOT bring BBQs as they can damage the important grassland on the Hill.*

Contacts:

For the latest news and updates, phone our
Information line: 0753 161 5983

If you'd like to talk to us, please contact:
Susan Acton-Campbell (Chair), Tel. **0117 947 5037**

You can also write to us at:

3, Corkers Hill, St. George, Bristol, BS5 8DT

Email:

friends@troopers-hill.org.uk

www.facebook.com/TroopersHill

Or go to the online forum at:

<http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/news&views>

To book a place on an event,
Phone Judith: 0117 955 9819 (Tue-Sat, 9am-5pm) Or email:
events2012@troopers-hill.org.uk

Walking for Health (St George Strollers)

Contact: Clare Willott
0117 941 4514

To report incidents on Troopers Hill, phone Bristol Parks:
0117 922 3719

Report criminal activity to the police on 999

or

Police local beat manager, Pete Crawford, can be contacted on
07919 628 304

www.troopers-hill.org.uk