

Friends of Troopers Hill - It's Your Neighbourhood 2017

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 2016

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

- 1) completed the project for which we raised over £80,000. A fenced play area for children under 5 has been installed in Troopers Hill Field. Beside this play area an activity trail has been built for children aged up to 11. This has led to a much wider range of age ranges visiting Troopers Hill and many more family groups. We have been particularly pleased to see young girls visiting on their own. Before the play provision only boys were seen visiting without adults. Full details on <http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/play/>
- 2) been awarded two grants and installed a new, geological interpretation board on Troopers Hill. Many people have been seen reading the new board, learning about 300 million years of geology and following the instructions to feel the rough stones of the pennant sandstone chimney.
- 3) Helped and supported Natural Learners Bristol to set a weekly Wild Play session for under-5s and their parents and a weekly afterschool club, Outdoor Explorers. This is on a trial basis. With evidence of the trial's success Natural Learners will apply for grant funding to take the project further.
- 4) Found funding to pay for ParkWork <http://www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/parkwork/> to carry out conservation work on Troopers Hill for 1 day a month. This scheme provides training and skills development for those people needing additional support to secure permanent employment. This supplements the work of volunteers and Bristol Parks staff.
- 5) Hosted visits from the Royal Agricultural College and the City of Bristol College explaining the conservation management carried out on Troopers Hill.
- 6) Welcomed another visit from geography students from Bridgwater College. Troopers Hill features in a Geography 'A' level textbook they use.
- 7) Celebrated the implementation of Bristol City Council's new bye-laws in April this year. Thanks to our representations and evidence recorded of many fires, Troopers Hill is the only council owned green space in Bristol where barbecues may not be used anywhere on the site.
- 8) Carried out a consultation which closed 12th July on whether local people will support our funding bid to improve access to Troopers Hill and replace rotting, wooden boundary fencing. We believe we have sufficient evidence from the 223 responses to make an initial application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for up to £100,000. More details on www.troopers-hill.org.uk/waystonature

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 achieved Green Flag status each year from 2007/8 to 2013/14. Bristol City Council no longer had 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. This was repeated in 2016 and in addition Troopers Hill was awarded the Suttons Seeds Cup for an outstanding area of nature conservation. 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 514 members on our free membership list, 1047 Facebook 'likes' and 705 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 6th anniversary in May. The Strollers celebrated their 145th walk on 11th July. More than 130 people have attended these walks.

In addition to work parties and regular meetings, we have organised over 132 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 carried out local consultation about seeking funding improving the existing wheelchair access route to Troopers Hill and replacing deteriorating wooden fencing and gates to keep out motorbikes. Results of the consultation will be collated and using that information, if the responses are appropriate, we will make an application for funding approaching £100,000 to the Heritage Lottery Fund.

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

http://epetitions.bristol.gov.uk/epetition_core/view/ProtectParks

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



The Avon Glen Pipes and Drums came to help us celebrate the opening on **Saturday 22/10/2016**



Conservation Work Party of Saturday 3rd June, 2017

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
6.2.2.9	Removal of all tree seedlings from grassland and heathland	4 & 5
6.2.2.10	Control bramble and scrub encroaching onto grassland and heathland	4 & 5
6.2.2.11	Manage to maintain some areas of heath type scrub with broom	4 & 5

A green-minded hen party came to help





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



Proud ParkWork Team – June 2016

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



New Geology Interpretation Board - December 2016




Tropical Rain Forest



Welcome to Troopers Hill Regionally Important Geological Site

Formed by the river

You are standing on a small plateau, 70 metres above sea level. The steep slopes leading down on three sides were formed by the action of streams and the River Avon. In front of you the steep slope drops sharply down the sheer sides of an old quarry, exposing the 300 million year old Pennant Sandstone that forms much of Troopers Hill.

Troopers Hill rocks

Under the hill is a thick pile of sandstones and mudstones, with several seams of coal and fireclay. Three hundred million years ago the area was on the equator, a place of rivers and swamps, covered by a forest of primitive plants including giant horsetails, ferns and trees. The sediment hardened into rock, tilted steeply eastwards.





Late Carboniferous Landscape. © Artist: Shane Feeney. Devised by the Avon RIGS group. Reproduced by kind permission of South Gloucestershire Council.

Soft shield fern

Origin of the rocks

Sand was carried by the rivers while mud settled under lakes. These hardened into sandstone and mudstone. The remains of the forest plants settled beneath swamps as layers of peat, which later became coal. The soil in which the plants grew became fireclay.

Look out for... black pieces of coal and fossil plants embedded in the rocks. Fossilised remains of a giant 40cm wingspan dragonfly have been found near Bristol in rocks of a similar age to Troopers Hill. Look at how the colours of the soil change in different places on the hill; black areas are coal spoil left over from mining. Iron minerals colour the rocks purple, red, brown or yellow.

Timeline

Earth's rocks in millions of years



Feel the rough surface of the chimney's Pennant Sandstone. It is made of sand grains, mainly quartz, is the most common mineral on the Earth's surface and harder than steel.

Friends of Troopers Hill acknowledge the assistance of The Curry Fund of the Geologists' Association.

Find out more at: www.geologistsassociation.org.uk

Additional funding from Bristol City Council.

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A fascinating mix of history and wildlife on your doorstep

Our next event – 12th August 2017

Bugs and Beasties Hunt

with expert Rupert Higgins
Saturday, 12th August, from 4pm
Troopers Hill Local Nature Reserve

Bring a picnic

No Barbecues – Bristol Parks Byelaws



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.

