

# The Friends of Troopers Hill

# The Hill

July/August 2006



Friends had just set out their stall at the "Bristol Festival of Nature" on Friday 2nd June, when they had a very unexpected visit. A voice caused us to turn and shake an offered hand when it said "Hello, I'm David Cameron, tell me about Troopers Hill". We had a unique opportunity to fill the Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition in on all the details of the Hill and the work that Friends do to look after it. Wouldn't it be great if it resulted in a future government spending some much needed cash on positive support for our Local Nature Reserves?

We handed out nearly 500 copies of our events leaflet that weekend, received a lot of strong interest and made valuable new contacts. Many, many thanks to the volunteers who gave up their time to come and promote *your* Nature Reserve and helped raise awareness.

Thanks also to Arts at St. Aidans and all those who helped make our first ever concert a wonderful success. A beautiful, hot evening with a gentle breeze produced a magical environment for the Brass Band Concert. Thanks also to BBC Radio Bristol who gave us an enormous amount of publicity, including mentioning it on several news bulletins that morning and doing a live interview on top of the Hill with several Friends.

Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre (BRERC) recently carried out a survey of Troopers Hill Local Nature Reserve. We're very pleased to report that they awarded it an A+. That translates as an A for the importance of the community of plant and wildlife, and a + for the management of the environment. Friends are obviously doing something right!

Many apologies to Nick Hudson who wrote the article on heather in the last edition. Due to an oversight by your ed, the last line and his credit got squeezed out. We look forward to more articles from Nick in the future. In the meantime you can view another article he has written, about some of the flowers and grasses on the Hill, on our website. If you would like a printed, colour copy of this article, please contact Susan (details in Contacts section).

We've recently been rather concerned to see the appearance of a Christmas Tree that someone has planted near the second Troopers Hill Road gate. Concerned because it is not an indigenous species and it has unfortunately been planted in an inappropriate place. If you planted the tree, or know who did, please get in touch with us as we respect that it may well have been planted for a particular reason and we would rather facilitate an appropriate repositioning. Regrettably, it will have to be removed before it can take root and upset the balance of nature on the Hill itself.

Now for the bad news—an incident on the Hill occurred on Saturday, 8 July. Two teenage girls were mugged by a group of about ten boys. Police have apprehended at least two of the group and of course Friends' sympathy and thoughts go out to the victims. We want all to enjoy the Hill in safety and do our best to facilitate that. The miscreants have parents who probably didn't know what their children were up to. Help us keep the Hill safe by encouraging your kids to act sensibly and report their peers who do not to the police.

## Imagine a golden July evening...

*You are sitting comfortably on a grassy hillside in the hot sunshine and can see remarkable views beyond the trees, over the landmark buildings of Bristol, the balloon field at Ashton Court and across to the edge of the Mendips. You hear mellow brass band music, and you feel relaxed and uplifted by the cheerful sights and sounds and the lovely weather. You look forward to opening the cool-box that you brought, and discovering the refreshing drinks and delicious food packed in it.*

*You feel fortunate to be alive on such a glorious day, having a picnic, in good company, being entertained. Your everyday cares fall away, forgotten. You listen to a short informative talk about the Local Nature Reserve that you are so lucky to have nearby, and you appreciate the chance to learn something new. You are glad that someone took the time and trouble to arrange this delightful event.*

This is what you missed, if you didn't come to the summer evening of outdoor music on Saturday 1 July. The concert was organised by Friends of Troopers Hill in conjunction with Arts at St Aidan's and featured Bristol East Band on Troopers Hill. In the raffle, Maureen won a flight in the Somerfield hot air balloon, and Anne received tickets for another concert later in the St Aidan's series. It was a wonderful occasion which will remain in the memory for a long time. I know: because I was there.

*A Friend of Troopers Hill.*

## The 2nd Troopers Hill Balloon Race is Coming

Our Family Fun Picnic on 12 August brings another chance for you to win a fabulous prize for the kids (big or small!) Bring your family, friends and a picnic to enjoy a lovely afternoon on the Hill, with the kids kept occupied by our International story teller, Cassandra. The event, which starts at 4.00 pm, again coincides with the Bristol Balloon Fiesta and you can sponsor a balloon to win this our second balloon race.



This silver balloon inflates to almost 48 inches and can fly around your home or buzz the dog! We'll provide the helium and your first set of batteries. All you have to do is sponsor a balloon at £2 each or £5 for three. If you can't make the day itself, you can still sponsor a balloon in advance by calling Susan on 0117 947 5037. The prize is again sponsored by Bristol Video Solutions ([www.bristolvideosolutions.tv](http://www.bristolvideosolutions.tv)) who make all the videos for our website.

Our first quiz night is taking place at 7.30 pm on 5 September at the St. George Community Centre. Sign up now by phoning Susan or adding your name to the list at the Community Centre. £5 per team of up to 6 people. There will be a cash prize and a raffle with loads of other prizes for you to win so come along and join the fun. Tea, coffee and snacks will also be available.

## Dates for Your Diary

**Tuesday 1 August:** Purple Prowl. 7pm. Book your place now - contact Susan. *A guided walk to learn about the history and wildlife of Troopers Hill. Local botanist Libby Houston will tell us about the grasses and other species that we find.*

**Saturday 5 August:** Work Party on the Hill. 10am to midday. *Meet at corner of Troopers Hill Road and Greendown.*

**Wednesday 9 August:** Meeting. 7.15 to 9.00pm. *Wesley Memorial Church Hall.*

**Saturday 12 August:** Family Fun Picnic. 4pm. *An afternoon of fun for all the family before watching the Fiesta balloons. Sponsor a balloon in our own balloon race and win the Radio Controlled Blimp!*

**Saturday 2 September:** Work Party on the Hill. 10am to midday. *Meet at corner of Troopers Hill Road and Greendown.*

**Sunday 3 September:** Avon Valley Walk. Phone for meeting points and times. *A guided walk through Conham, Dundry Park, Troopers Hill & Eastwood Farm.*

## We want to hear from You

As you will know if you have visited the hill, and can see from this Newsletter, the last two months have seen a great deal of activity. We installed benches, trees have been cut to restore part of the view from The Field and work has started on the wheelchair path. We have also given the site a lot of publicity through the Festival of Nature, Music on the Hill and BBC Breathing Places. This has all gone to raise the profile of the site and will help to ensure that we continue to get more than our share of attention from Bristol Parks.

All of this has been achieved by a relatively small group of regular volunteers and has taken up a lot of our time. Although we have for the most part enjoyed it, and are proud of our achievements, we have been disappointed not to receive more feedback. We would like to do much more in the future including trying to raise more grant money. To do so we need to show that we have the community's support. So please take time to drop us a line with your views, either by post, email or via the survey form on the website. Tell us what you like or don't like, what events you enjoyed what further improvements you would like to see.

## Bench Making on the Hill

We were new to the Friends of Troopers Hill but being hands-on people and eager to learn new skills, we immediately signed up for the bench-making challenge. We later realised that this process created a wonderful analogy for how we have joined the Friends.

After essential gazebo construction, our instructors presented assorted pieces of wood resembling bench-parts. It can't be this easy, we thought? Sure enough, these became merely the tools of this traditional trade, the Scrape-horses. One very large chunk of oak tree and two beautiful planks of Elm were destined to become *our* benches. We split the oak into leg-sized pieces, used the scrape-horses to shape them and smoothed the surface of the seat. After many hours, plenty of laughter and delicious home-made cakes, the group had produced two bench seats, fourteen legs (two spare) and several blisters! Joining the parts together was not quite as 'traditional', but involved its own complications. We left feeling exhausted, proud and accepted.

An evening to cement the benches in place triggered a grand turn-out. It may have been the suggestion of some wine, but that's being cynical! Fortunately, our earlier camaraderie had not dwindled as we formed an assembly line to repair the legs, which had become dis-attached from the seat. We then dug holes, positioned the bench and secured it with (remarkably) quick-drying concrete.

Finally having something to sit on inspired the emergence of cameras and the wine, and as we raised a glass to the bench and its creators, it felt like we were also toasting our new friendships. The remaining benches are now also in position and there they rest, enticing weary visitors to relax and enjoy a spectacular view over Bristol.

*Ben & Jen Valsler*

**Editor's note:** Unfortunately, since Ben and Jenny wrote this article for us, some mean, small minded individuals have removed the seats from 2 of *your* benches. If you saw anything, please let us know so that we can advise the Police. Now the teenagers who use the Hill have 2 less places to gather. Sad or what?

## Can't Believe Our Luck!

Returning to work on a cold January morning after the 2004 Christmas break, bad news awaited us – our Company was in the hands of the receivers.

It was a difficult time. 17 years of Loyalty out the windows but our friends did their best to cheer me and my wife Liz up. The job scene didn't look good but activities at home and with Friends of Troopers Hill helped pass the time. C.V's are sent out, hand delivered where possible, and interviews follow.

Eureka, at the end of April, I get a start with a company (part of Akzo Nobel) only ten minutes walk from home! Duties vary and the staff are friendly and great to get on with.

Akzo Nobel, like FoTH, produce a newsletter updating us about what other parts of the group are up to. A copy of one came through informing us of the launch of the "Akzo Nobel community funding program".

To get the grant you obviously had to be staff, and also belong to a community group. I was with FoTH so it looked as though there might be a possibility of some funds for the group. One stipulation was that the grant had to go towards a particular project and after consultations with Susan (FoTH chair) it was decided that tree felling and bench placements on the path of Troopers Hill field would be ideal. Details were put down on paper and forwarded to Akzo Nobel UK HQ, along with photographs of the site. A few emails later and the news was unbelievable - Akzo Nobel European HQ in Belgium had Ok'd the funding!

The Council has already cleared the trees and the project should be completed by the end of this year. We are hoping that Akzo Nobel will fund us for another two years. The group's regular meetings are always mentioning the project as it is one of our main features at the moment. But it always brings on a smile as we just can't believe our luck.

Thank you very much Akzo Nobel.

*Alan Watt.*

## CONTACT US

If you want to talk to us about issues raised in this newsletter, or about any other concerns, please contact:

**Susan Acton-Campbell** (Chair) on **0117 947 5037**

or write to

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

email: [chair@troopers-hill.org.uk](mailto:chair@troopers-hill.org.uk)

**Sally Oldfield** (Bristol Council Local Nature Reserves Officer) on **0117 922 4429**

email: [sally\\_oldfield@bristol-city.gov.uk](mailto:sally_oldfield@bristol-city.gov.uk)

Or

Post a message on the new Forum at:

[www.troopers-hill.org.uk](http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk)