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The Friends of Troopers Hill

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Spring 2014



I'm guessing not many of us can remember a winter quite as wet as the recent one has been! Friends had two work parties cancelled due to rain (which has put us well behind schedule with winter maintenance) and there have been puddles of mud everywhere on

a hill that normally drains well. Regular walkers may have noticed the drainage channels Friends have been digging to drain away water. Too late to stop the mud forming this time round, but hopefully after they dry out and wear flat again, they may help next time.

A new sign will shortly be appearing by the entrance from the Field to the Hill. On the fence on the left as you enter the Hill, it will have details of how to download our Audio Trail. It will include a "QR code", which is the small square with dots in it. When you point a smartphone camera at this square, it can take you straight to the download page. Cool technology, huh?

Our first ever "Star Gazing" events have now successfully taken place thanks to the Bristol Astronomical Society. The first evening suffered some cloud, but still enabled successful views of Jupiter and the Moon. The second evening was rather more successful (if rather colder) with a clear sky revealing many more planets and stars to be seen. See inside.

First Bus have produced cards for people who have a disability to use on their buses. They are called Safe Journey and Better Journey cards. First Bus are promoting them on their website. The cards have space to add personal help information as well as a range of options like "I need help to count my change", "Please be patient, I have a hidden disability" and "Please wait for me to sit down"; they are credit card size and come in a plastic wallet. You can see more about them at:

www.firstgroup.com/ukbus/bristol_bath/bus_access/safe_journey_card/ and the contact to get copies for distribution is: mark.williams@firstgroup.com

Lastly, a reminder that "Music on the Hill" will be taking place on Saturday 21st June. Having had to cancel two years in a row now, we are once again pleased to be welcoming the Ambling Band for a second attempt at entertaining us. Fingers crossed for better weather this year and a chance to enjoy music, picnics (but no BBQs) and wonderful views.

To Boldly Go...on Troopers Hill

Thanks to the volunteers of the Bristol Astronomical Society <http://www.bristolastro.org.uk/www/> we had a close up view of stars, galaxies, nebulae and the Moon from Troopers Hill in February and March. Starting with a brief overview of the sky and finding your way around with the naked eye, we then moved on to looking through telescopes to see such sights as Jupiter's moons, the double star Almach (Andromeda Gamma) and the Orion nebula. We were also lucky enough to spot two shooting stars just as we were finishing our second session.



Eye to the telescope

These events, new to Troopers Hill, were very popular and we hope to hold them again next year. We will also be applying for Dark Sky Discovery Site status for Troopers Hill.

Justin Smith

The whole Bristol environmental community is mourning the sudden death of Justin Smith from a heart attack at the unfairly young age of 46. He was a larger than life figure, an enthusiast who shared his knowledge and understanding of the complex and vital world of fungi with everyone. He gave his time and energy readily to others and will be fondly remembered by those of us who joined his "Fungi Forays" on Troopers Hill, or his Woodland Management & Lichen talk to the St George Strollers



He was also a key member of the city's environmental team whose tireless work behind the scenes to protect and enhance the very varied wildlife of the city is rarely recognised, but plays a very significant role in ensuring that the city maintains its exceptional wildlife. He was very "hands on" and would typically turn up on his bicycle to supervise the building of a new gate or fence in Crews Hole Woods.

Justin will be greatly missed, and the thoughts of us all are with his wife, Lucy, and son Wilf.

Bright colours - Dissappointing result

Dog fouling is a problem for St George as a whole. It is one of the priorities the St George Neighbourhood Partnership has given to John Atkinson, Bristol City Council's Neighbourhood Working Co-ordinator, to address. (<http://www.stgeorgenp.org.uk/about-us/priorities-and-projects/oupriorities/>)

Those of you who live near Air Balloon Hill Primary School will have seen the colourful posters put up by pupils to highlight the problems on paths running past their school. A Dog Day was held in St George Park last year in response to the problem there.

To better understand the extent of the problem on Troopers Hill, volunteers, together with John Atkinson, cleared the Hill, Field and Woodland of all dog faeces visible from paths. This was done late morning on Friday 7th February. 108 piles were removed. A count was then done several times a day until Monday, 10th February. Each pile found was circled with a spray painted circle to draw attention to the problem.



By 8am the next morning, Saturday, 8th February, a further 42 piles of poo had been left. This level of fouling continued over the weekend and Monday, despite some very bad weather and fresh anti-fouling posters displayed at each entrance.

Weighing the contents of the Hill and Field's dog bins enabled us to work out how much dog waste is disposed of responsibly. The sad result is that at least

ONE THIRD OF DOG WASTE ON TROOPERS HILL IS NOT PICKED UP!

John Atkinson will be leading an enforcement visit to the Hill during March. The survey highlighted the worst areas and this is where the team will concentrate their efforts.

We need your help. No-one has found the perfect solution to stopping irresponsible dog walkers leaving dog waste in public areas. There is no money to fund enforcement officers to have a 24 hour presence on Troopers Hill's 20 acres. We have some ideas. You may well have better ones. Please could you complete and return our questionnaire which is enclosed with this newsletter? More copies will be available at our stand at St Aidan's Community Fair in Fir Tree Lane on Saturday 22nd March, 11am-2pm.

For those of you with online access you will be able to follow our progress on <http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/clearUp/>

By the way, it is part of Bristol City Council's responsibility to clear dog mess from the public highway as part of normal street cleansing. If there is dog mess on a pavement near you can have it cleared by ringing 0117 922 2000 or using the online form on <http://www.bristol.gov.uk/page/bins-recycling-and-street-cleaning/street-care-and-cleaning>

Susan Acton-Campbell

George Elliott

We were sorry to hear recently of the death of well-known local historian George Elliott. George had collected a wealth of photographs and information about Hanham and the surrounding areas over the years. As mentioned in the Summer 2013 edition of 'The Hill', he kindly donated some of them to Friends of Troopers Hill.

Our first direct contact with George was last Spring when, at the suggestion of Brian Iles who joined us on last year's geology walk, Susan attended a talk by George in Hanham. Shortly after this George contacted us with the offer of a donation. Susan and I visited him in Bitton to collect the archive of information he had for us.

Soon after our visit, George moved to Marshfield from where he wrote several letters to us, with more photographs and information. As well as the photographs there were hand-written notes about the history of the area that Margaret Watson has kindly typed up for us.

George also donated several large ledgers and more photographs to Bristol Record Office. It is good to know that the results of his years of research will not be lost.

Over the next few months I will be uploading the photographs and other information from George to our website at www.troopers-hill.org.uk/history/GeorgeElliottPhotos.

This is one of his photos. Taken from Troopers Hill, it shows the partially demolished St Anne's Board Mills.



Rob Acton-Campbell

From Falconry to Deer Walking

Thanks to the St George West Neighbourhood Matched Fund scheme we have just been awarded £700 to fund our October event of a [Falconry display](#) to give a live example of the natural food chain and the importance of falcons and other raptors. This will be a first for Troopers Hill and we look forward to welcoming you to this event. Make sure Sunday 5th October 2pm-4.30pm is in your diaries.

If you have an idea for a project or event that would benefit people in St George West, send in your applications as soon as possible. It is the last year of this funding scheme and the closing date for applications is noon, Monday 14th April. More information on <http://stgeorgewestcf.wordpress.com/>.

Last year we were delighted to hear our application for £650 to fund special walks for the [St George Strollers](#), our Walking for Health Group, to attract new walkers and enthuse existing walkers, had been granted. The first of these walks was held on Wednesday 14th March with a coach taking us to Ashton Court and rangers guiding us round the park, showing us the Red Deer and Fallow Deer and sharing much fascinating information with us. Photos on <http://www.flickr.com/photos/wfhsusan/sets/72157642312901425/>

All our events are free. Thank you to all those generous people and organisations who have [given us money](#). More is always welcome and details of how to make a donation can be obtained from Susan (see contacts list) or visiting <http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/grants.htm>.

www.troopers-hill.org.uk

Memories of Troopers Hill



I grew up on Avening Rd, overlooking Troopers Hill. Every Sunday morning about 11am, a group of 6 or so of us would head down Troopers Hill Rd, up over the Hill past the chimney to the Field, with a football. A group of other kids would turn up and introduce themselves, then we'd have a game.

There was a little old lady by the name of Heather and she'd bring her dog over the Field – he was a big, black Staffordshire Bulldog type of a thing, Jake his name was. He was nuts - she'd let him off the lead and he'd come chasing after us. We'd get on the floor and he'd nearly lick you to death. The problem was that if we were playing football, many a time we'd have a decent football – a Mitre Delta, cost us about £5 or £6 in those days, which was a lot of money. Jake would come along and grab it. Then we'd have to try and get it off him, but by the time we got it back, he would have popped it. So what we would do was all chip in and buy ourselves another Mitre Delta, and then also buy a cheaper ball for about 99p to take with us. So we'd take them both along and play with the good ball. Then when we saw Heather and Jake coming along, we'd quickly get the other ball out and start kicking it around. When he grabbed it, we wouldn't mind as it was only the cheaper ball. Jake was never a threat to us, he was always placid but liked to chase the ball. When you got home you'd have to have a bath because he'd been licking you all over and it would be in your head and everywhere. He was great fun.

We weren't destructive, we'd just enjoy ourselves. Occasionally we'd kick the ball into the allotments. Usually I'd draw the short straw and have to go over and get it. I'd blame my mate and said he'd had a dodgy shot and kicked over one of their cabbages.

A few of my friends were a bit of a daredevil and would climb the cliffs in the Gully, but I was always more of a climber of trees myself. We'd get the odd football stuck up there and I would have to climb up and get it down. I remember going up was all right, but coming back down was another matter.

A friend of mine, Rob, was a bit more agile than me, he decided – I told him not to – to get inside the chimney and "Spider Man" crawl up the chimney. He poked his head out of the top, but then it was a mat-

ter of getting down and I said "Rob, you got up there and now you're going to have to get down", and he said "but I can't!" He did get down eventually, but it took him a while.

We would end up playing war or something using strips of the bamboo [Japanese Knotweed] as machine guns. Because it was a large area, we'd just get lost in the bamboo and run around pretending to kill each other. We used to watch a lot of war films in those days – "Where Eagles Dare", "Bridge over the River Kwai" - they were proper war films!

My mates built an underground den near Troopers Hill. It was incredible how they did it. It took them a month or so to do it, they dug a hole in the roof to make a chimney so they could have a fire underneath. We were kids and we didn't know anything about supporting it, but the ground was solid.

We used to go hunting for creatures, looking under stones for insects, Slow Worms and things like that. We came across the odd Adder, but we always looked after ourselves. We knew the dangers and we would keep our trousers tucked into our socks to stop insects getting in and stings from nettles.

We didn't know about things like child molesters in our day, but there would always be a group of us and we'd look after each other. Any problems, we'd always stick as a group and if anyone was missing we'd always have a "mates" call and where to meet up.

On a Sunday, when it got to about three o'clock, we'd go home and my Mum would have my dinner ready, we'd have our roast beef dinner and then the boys would come down the house and we'd watch the match on the telly. That was the best day of the week for me.

Keith James

You may not have realised it, but the Friends of Troopers Hill are gradually building a library of books and photos relating to the Hill and nature in general that you can borrow. Some of them are owned by us and others have kindly been lent on long term.

Amongst them are:

- A new key to wild flowers by John Howard (2 copies)
- The Wild Flower Key by Francis Rose (2 copies)
- Biology of Invertebrates (4th ed) Jan A Pechenik
- Principles of Conservation Biology G K Meffe, R Carroll
- Botany (2nd ed) Moore, Clark, Vodopich (complete with student study guide)

If you would like more details they are available here: www.troopers-hill.org.uk/info.htm

Live on Troopers Hill

Music on the Hill



Saturday 21st
June

from 6.00pm

THE AMBLING BAND!



*"Brass and Pink
collide to create a
rich cacophony of
sights and sounds"
Not to be missed!*

*Bring a picnic (to protect the grassland, please no BBQs)
enjoy the views and listen to the band for what is sure to be
a very special evening of free music.*



Friends of
Troopers Hill

www.troopers-hill.org.uk
www.facebook.com/troopershill
www.twitter.com/troopershill
theamblingband.co.uk

ABC of Troopers Hill

S is for Soil

The acidity or alkalinity of soil has a bearing on the different nutrients available for plant life. Some plants have a strong preference for one or the other. The soil on Troopers Hill is mainly acid, overlying Pennant sandstone. The early lead and copper smelting industries in the Avon valley throughout the eighteenth century may have affected the natural environment on the hill. Both produce sulphur-laden smoke which may have increased the acidity of the soil in the surrounding area. Troopers Hill local nature reserve is the only significant area of lowland heathland and low-land acidic grassland within the Bristol boundary. The reserve is carefully managed to conserve the areas of acid soil which support acidic grassland and heathland vegetation, and provide habitats for rare flora and invertebrates. Those habitats rely on the very poorest soil with minimal maintenance. Areas of bare soil evident in many places on the hill are important for invertebrates, providing places for them to burrow, and opportunities for them to bask in the sun. In addition, the acid soil provides favourable conditions for the yellow broom, and purple heather and ling, which in their respective seasons are conspicuous and notable features of the landscape.

For management purposes, Troopers Hill is divided into 'compartments' according to the characteristics of the soil and vegetation. Bristol Parks and Friends of Troopers Hill collaborate to prevent and control the incursion of bramble and hawthorn scrub, saplings and bracken into the heathland and grassland. One of the compartments, adjacent to Green Down, has more fertile soil than the rest of the nature reserve and supports a different range of grasses and wild flowers. It is managed as a meadow and receives a 'hay cut' once a year, in summer. Any cut material is removed so that it does not enrich the soil as it decomposes.

Bryn Friallen

Dates for your Diary

Work Parties: Saturdays Apr 5th, May 3rd, June 7th, July 5th. 10am—midday. Meet at corner of Troopers Hill Road and Greendown. *Help us look after Troopers Hill. Gentle exercise and a bit of a laugh over some coffee.*

Meetings. Thursdays Mar 27th, May 29th, July 24th. 7.15pm, Summerhill Methodist Church, 5 Air Balloon Road. *Come along and share your views on our Local Nature Reserve.*

Music on the Hill Saturday 21st June. See poster above.

St George Strollers: Fri 11th Apr: **8 Bridges Walk.** Meet 10.30am, Cascade Steps, The Centre. Wed 23rd Apr: **St George's Day Walk.** Meet Pile Marsh/Terrell Gardens Bus stop 10.05am for 36 bus. Thurs 8th May: **St Werburgh's Walk.** Meet Lidl car park, Lawrence Hill at 10.25am. Fri 23rd May: **3rd Birthday Walk and meeting.** Meet Summerhill Terrace entrance to Troopers Hill Field at 10.00am. Mon 9th June: **Arnos Vale Tour.** Meet Pile Marsh/Terrell Gardens Bus stop 9.20am for 36 bus (**Bookings only - contact Clare**). Tue 24th Jun: **Dame Sylvia Crowe Walk.** Meet Old Market, 10.10am. For bus to the Create Centre. Further details, contact Clare—see Contacts panel.

Walks: (booking essential—see Contacts panel) Sunday Apr 6th: **Dawn Chorus Walk.** 5.45—7.15am. A guided walk to listen to bird song led by expert Ed Drewitt.

Sunday May 18th: Wild Plants Walk. 10.30am—noon. Find out more about our local plants from expert Tony Titchen

Other events:

Saturday March 22nd: **St Aidan's Community Fair.** 11am—2pm. St Aidan's and St George church and hall, Fir Tree Lane. *Come and visit our stand.*

Friday April 18th: [Good Friday Service on Troopers Hill.](#) *Procession starts from Summerhill Methodist Church at 11.30am*

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

friends@troopers-hill.org.uk

www.facebook.com/TroopersHill

Or go to the online forum at:

www.troopers-hill.org.uk/news&views

To book a place on an event,

Phone Judith: 0117 955 9819 Or email:

events2014@troopers-hill.org.uk

Walking for Health (St George Strollers):

Contact: Clare Willott: 0117 941 4514

strollers@troopers-hill.org.uk

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. He can be contacted via the Police non-urgent phone number 101

www.troopers-hill.org.uk