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The Friends of Troopers Hill

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The Hill

Autumn 2013

Family Fun Picnic



The work on the lower chimney has been completed and the end result looks great. Although you can't easily see it from the road, the top has been re-made in a similar style to what is believed to be the original. This will protect the chimney from further weather damage. The street names,

which were removed, have been repainted and re-attached. They look very smart.

Meanwhile, work has also started on repairing the top chimney. You will recall that a survey earlier in the year discovered dangerous, crumbling mortar on the inside, so the entrance was temporarily closed off. We hope that the entrance will soon be open to all again, as before, so that children can once again dare each other to go in and look up!

Our usual, unreliable weather resulted in us having to cancel the "Music on the Hill" once again. Hard to believe that just a couple of weeks later we were in the middle of a heat-wave. Ah well. We're going to try again next year though, and hope to have the Ambling Band then.

You can now download an [audio trail](#) from our website. The trail is an MP3 file you can play on your smartphone or other device and will take you all over the Hill. It will take about 1.5 hours, and give you a lot of taster information about many aspects of the Hill, from the history, through the flora and fauna to the geology. If it's too long for one go, you can always return to finish it off. Also now available is a Tree Trail which you can download here: www.troopers-hill.org.uk/TreeTrail/ It will take you through the woods helping you identify many different types of trees. All our trails are now available at www.troopers-hill.org.uk/trails/index.htm

Great Balloon Fiesta this year. After a successful Saturday, which saw great business for the Bugs and Beasties event (not to mention our Portaloo), early the next morning, a balloon actually landed on the Hill. You can learn more about the Thailand-based pilot inside.



Thanks to a lovely day and a huge turn-out to watch the Balloon Fiesta our Bugs and Beasties event was extremely popular this year. We started at 4pm,



intending to end around 5.30, but in the event we were hard put to stop by 7!

Rupert Higgins and Dawn Lawrence of Wessex Ecological Consultancy were called upon to identify more bugs than we could count.

Our craft tent, run by Tim Floyd also did great business



with plenty of kids colouring, cutting things out, sticking them together and generally having fun creating.

Later that evening we were treated to a terrific fly-by with well over 100 balloons taking to the sky.



Don't Forget!

Thursday 5th December 2013—**Slide Show review of the Year.** A great chance to find out what's been happening on Troopers Hill this year. Join us afterwards for our annual AGM, tea and, with a bit of luck, cake.

It's Not Just Hot Air!

Lee Hooper grew up living on Queens Road. From the age of around 4, he sat on Troopers Hill and watched balloons flying from Ashton Court in the early years of the Bristol Balloon Fiesta. That started his fascination with the idea of balloon flying and that fascination was increased as a pupil at Air Balloon Hill School (his Grandmother was a Dinner Lady there). The school fêtes regularly had a tethered hot air balloon flying in the school grounds. He was bitten with the bug!

He came up with the idea of making model balloons, so he and his friends got hold of some spare material from Cameron Balloons and set about constructing one. Their first efforts were quite small, but they gradually got bolder and the balloons got bigger. They developed a great technique for launching balloons on Troopers Hill using the terrific updraft that is often apparent in the stack – caused by the Venturi effect – the wind blowing over the top sucks air out of the chimney.

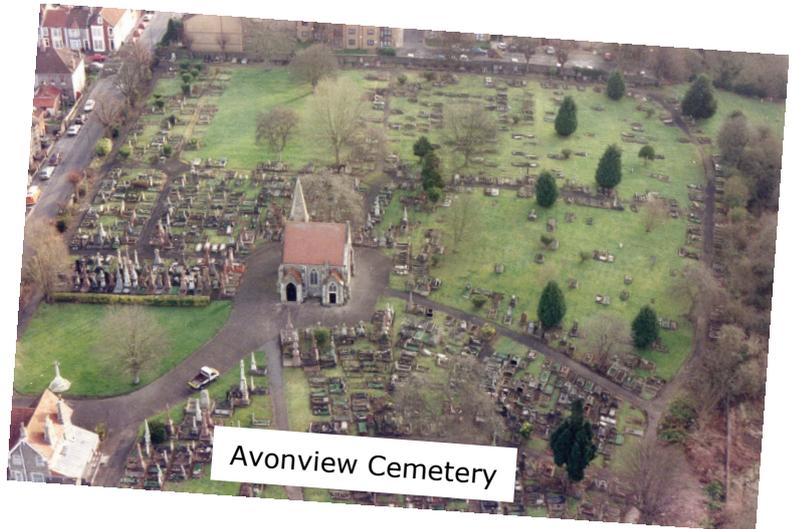
"We would stand in the chimney, and inflate the balloon. Then, when we let go, the updraft would send the balloon shooting out of the top up to a height of 300 or 400 feet, drifting out across the Hill."



Eventually their balloons were big enough to carry a basket of radio control kit. By the age of 8 they had started a small business using a camera and an alarm clock timed to take photographs as the balloons drifted over gardens, fields and woods.

"We would then have to run after them, or hop on our bikes to follow them to where they landed – often in someone's garden. Can we have our balloon back please made a change from asking for a ball!"

At the age of 14, Lee got friendly with a local balloonist and that enabled him to get involved with Bristol University Balloon Society. He started crewing for them and by the time he was 17 he had his private pilot's licence – the youngest person to have one.



Studying full time at Bristol University gave him the opportunity to go on and get his commercial pilot's licence at 20. From then on, while his fellow students were "stacking shelves" to earn some money, Lee was doing the job he loved, piloting balloons to pay for his degree in microbiology.

Since then, Lee has gone on to work professionally piloting balloons in Canada, Burma and, currently, Thailand. He works for [Lindstrand balloons](http://Lindstrandballoons.com) and is hoping to train pilots in Asia.

"There's a great opportunity for local Thai people to learn to pilot balloons and then operate flights offering trips over beautiful countryside to the huge tourist business. A real chance to help them get on."

Lee and his brother, Sam, who has just qualified for his own Private Pilot's Licence, flew during this year's Balloon Fiesta and are putting plans in place to be able to make a couple of flights a year from Troopers Hill Field.

"With a North Westerly wind we should be able to make some terrific flights along the river to Keynsham over some beautiful countryside. When we flew from Ashton Court on the Sunday morning this year, we were aiming to land on Troopers Hill, and that's exactly what we did!"

So, keep an eye out for those flights in the future. We hope to be able to bring you pictures from the air along the way when they start.



AVON INVASIVE WEEDS FORUM

The overall project aim is to establish the status of non-native plant species and prevent, control and reduce their negative impact in the River Frome and River Avon catchments.

We aim to prevent the deterioration of the catchment's natural ecosystems and protect local biological diversity.

The target species for this project are Japanese Knotweed, Giant Hogweed (both surveyed by the AIWF but managed by Bristol City and South Glos.Council) and Himalayan Balsam (mainly managed by volunteers where possible).

With the help of some dedicated volunteer surveyors, Rennie Dickens, Simon Randolph and Richard Bland, we have mapped over 32 kilometres of ditches, streams and rivers in the South Gloucestershire and Bristol region, these surveys have discovered all three invasive species.



The main problem is Himalayan Balsam.

It has started to dominate the banks and especially in the South Glos. Yate, Frampton Cotterell, Winterbourne, Frenchay and Oldbury Court area of the Frome, it can also be seen in abundance on the Avon in Eastwood Farm and at Conham River Park.

This can cause disruption to the structure of banks, erosion, sedimentation of the river, increased flooding, pollination disruption for native species and possible food web collapse of ecosystems when totally dominant (which doesn't seem far away!).

We have two students, Chris Newton from UWE and Carin Emer from Bristol University, studying the erosion effects of balsam and carrying out a PhD on the pollination implications for native species near to stands of balsam, respectively.



The balsam itself is very easy to pull out with a very shallow root system, however the sheer abundance of the plant means that the more people we have involved the closer we will get to achieve our goals.

As part of the BIGPULL we have managed 22 pulling events this summer with around 890 volunteer hours. Some great individuals and teams have been out with us, The Environment Agency Head office supplying 7 different teams, HSBC, Lloyds and Eurovia and Bristol City Council Sustainability team also supplying very enthusiastic dedicated groups.

Having cleared massive areas within Yate, Frampton Cotterell, Oldbury Court and the Malago we are looking for more groups and individuals interested for next summer!

Whether you are an individual, a Conservation Group or a Corporate Group please contact myself, Neil Green on 07825315647.

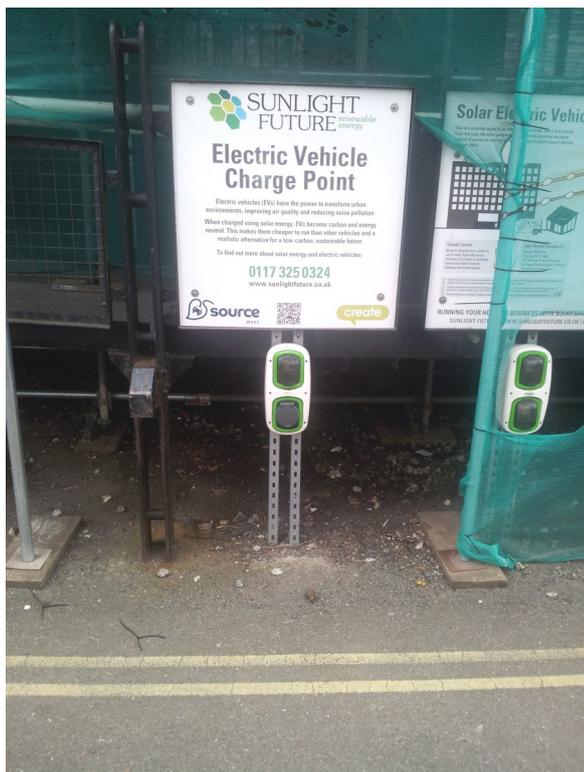
WE NEED YOU!!

Get involved and like the Avon Invasive Weeds Forum Facebook page; www.facebook.com/AvonInvasiveWeedsForum

Email – ngreen@bristolzoo.org.uk or go and have a look at the website (<http://www.aiwf.org.uk/>) or on Twitter: @avonweedsboy

Neil Green

What's Wrong in This Picture?



Good to see this environment-friendly provision outside the Create Centre by Cumberland Basin on a recent Walking for Health Walk. Good luck to anyone who manages to get away with it!

Dates for your Diary

Regular events:

Work Parties: Saturdays Oct 5th, Nov 2nd, Dec 7th, 10am—midday. Meet at Troopers Hill Road and Green-down. *Help us look after Troopers Hill. Gentle exercise and a bit of a laugh over some coffee.*

Meetings. Thursdays Nov 14th, Dec 5th (including Slide Show Review of the Year and AGM) 7.15pm, Summerhill Methodist Church, 5 Air Balloon Road. *Come along and share your views on our Local Nature Reserve.*

St George Strollers: Wed 9th Oct: **Wild Fest on the Northern Slopes.** Meet 9.30am, Terrell Rd bus top (Pile Marsh) for bus no 36. Fri 25th Oct: **Bath River and Canalside.** Meet 10.20am Aldi car park, Church Rd for bus 332. Mon 11th Nov: **Remembrance Day Walk.** Meet St George Library at 10.00am. Wed 27th Nov: **Lawrence Hill to Eastville Park.** Meet outside Lawrence Hill Station at 10.30am, for Wessex bus no 506. Mon 9th Dec: **Harbourside and Hotwells.** Meet Cascade Steps, The Centre at 10.30am. Thurs 19th Dec: **St George Park and Avonview Cemetery, plus Christmas Meeting.** Meet Beehive Centre, Stretford Rd at 10.00am. For further details, contact Clare—see Contacts panel.

Walks: (booking essential—see contacts panel)

Sunday Nov 3rd. Fungi Foray. 10.30am. *Join expert Justin Smith in a hunt for mushrooms and toadstools on Troopers Hill.*

Sunday Dec 8th. Avon Valley History. 10.30am. *Join Rob Acton-Campbell for a tour of Troopers Hill & Avon Valley Woodlands, talking about the fascinating history of the Hill and the surrounding area.*

ABC of Troopers Hill

Q is for Quercus, which is the scientific name for the oak tree genus. The English Oak (*Quercus robur*), the Sessile Oak (*Quercus petraea*) and the Holm Oak (*Quercus ilex*) can be found on Troopers Hill and in the woods adjoining the nature reserve.

Oak tree flowers take the form of catkins which appear in the spring. The fruits are acorns, a single nut borne in a cup-shaped structure called a cupule. Oak wood is dense, hard and strong, its high tannin content render it resistant to fungus and decay. Oak timber has been used, among other things, for ship-building, house construction, decorative paneling, furniture, and barrels for wine and spirits. Oak bark, also high in tannin, is used in the process of tanning hides for leather.

The English Oak and the Sessile Oak are similar in appearance, both deciduous, having the characteristic wavy-edged leaves and bearing acorns in the autumn. The trees can be told apart by the length of the leaf stalks (longer on the Sessile Oak) and the stalks of the acorns, which are longer in the English Oak and almost absent on the Sessile form. Hybrids of the two species are also known. They are valuable for their biodiversity, as they host the widest range of herbivorous invertebrates (more than 400 species) of any native plant.

The Holm (or Holly) Oak is an evergreen from the Mediterranean, whose young foliage shows attractive rosy and pale green colours. The leaves have a slight resemblance to holly leaves, being toothed and somewhat spiny. The saplings occur widely all over the Hill and in the woods. They are probably spread by jays taking and burying the acorns. In England the Holm Oak is listed as an invasive non-native species which is harmful to biodiversity. Friends of Troopers Hill regularly cut down Holm Oak saplings during their work parties, preventing the trees from reaching maturity and bearing more acorns.

Bryn Friallen

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
www.twitter.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:
events2013@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 beat manager, Pete Crawford, can be contacted on
07919 628 304