As I write the nation remains in the grip of the COVID–19 Coronavirus. This has had an unprecedented impact on the way we go about our daily lives. Everything previously considered routine now has to be considered in a different way.

The Downs, like everywhere else, has not been immune from the impact of the measures required to try and contain the virus. Funderworld’s Easter event has been cancelled, other scheduled events for the Downs are also in doubt, and the Downs League and University football has been suspended.

As an organisation FODAG has also been severely impacted by the outbreak. Your committee has decided for the moment to suspend our monthly meetings and where possible conduct our business electronically or by phone. As a precaution the City Council Parks department have taken the decision to cancel all volunteer participation in parks and open spaces across the board. This means that FODAG has had to cancel many planned activities, including walks, talks, goat monitoring, litter clearing, conservation, renovation tasks and planting projects.

Our plan to replant the flowerbeds at the top of Blackboy Hill has, for the moment, been shelved. The plants are ready and waiting at the Blaise Nursery and we will get this project underway as soon as we possibly can. We will of course be hoping to get all our regular activities up and running again when the threat has finally passed. We will be sending emails to all our members as and when there is any change to the situation and we will be posting regular updates on the website.

The Downs themselves are particularly busy at the moment as the hale and hearty are still managing to get out and about and enjoy some daily exercise and fresh air. The advantage, of course, is that the wide expanse of the Downs permits visitors and users to take sensible precautions and maintain the recommended social distancing.

As managing the outbreak occupies our thoughts there are other things to consider. In the winter edition of the Newsletter I mentioned that the committee had compiled an Action Plan designed to help us remain focused and to prioritise actions that will benefit us in running the organisation and to assist in helping us to meet the challenges of the coming years. We have
Chairman’s Report April 2020

now completed an exercise to review over twenty key issues and to consider which of these are the most important. Increasing our membership was considered as an absolute priority followed by our conservation projects, and finally ensuring we work to encourage more people from a diverse range of backgrounds to get to the Downs and enjoy what we often take for granted.

Early in April and just before the full shut down we were able to complete the planting of a small spinney on Circular Road. The purpose was to mark the life and work of the late Richard Bland who gave so much to the Downs and citywide.

Despite the devastation wreaked by the virus nature is still going on all around us, trees and shrubs are bursting into life, the birds are actively going about their business and the sun still rises in the east every morning. There is light at the end of the tunnel and we will come through this and return to something more akin to normal life.

Please continue to observe Government guidance when you are out and about, be safe and keep well.

Robert Westlake, Chair

Cover Photo: Tim Clarke

Please note the credit for the last newsletter cover photo was cropped off the print version - and should have been credited to Morweena Penrose. Our apologies.
Travelling to work in the late 1980s I observed ever increasing damage to the lovely little Downs Bus Shelter, and, in my then role as Chairman of the Sneyd Park Residents’ Association (SPRA) I sought, and obtained, permission from the City Council to start repairs on this unique structure. With £2,300 raised from Sneyd Park residents plus a top up of £800 from the City Council, timber was purchased from Wickham & Norris Timber Yard and extensive repairs carried out by myself and three SPRA colleagues: John Bretton, Aubrey Matthews and John MacKenzie during the summer of 1991 (see before and after photos attached). This was followed by an official opening and “ribbon cutting ceremony” by Lord Mayor Cllr. Peter Abraham. It was during the rebuilding that I learnt that the shelter had been built in 1938 as the first bus stop linking the Tramway terminus at the top of Blackboy Hill with the country bus service.

Following the restoration I resolved to maintain the shelter from that point on and repair any damage within 24 hours of it taking place. As a result, since 1991, the shelter has been visited almost every Sunday morning before 8am to remove the rubbish of Saturday night, wash away the urine etc, inspect the shelter for any graffiti or damage and take appropriate action.

Over the years not only have vandalised roof edging shingles been repaired but, on one occasion, Six hours were spent removing extensive graffiti, and re-varnishing of the rough timber cladding at the rear of the shelter.

On one memorable occasion about 15 years ago I was confronted by the sight of all the ridge tiles strewn over the pavement with nails sticking up from student damage, I presumed, the previous night. These were replaced the following week using a ladder to access the ridge of the shelter.

Over the years, damage has been sporadic due, I presume, to the fact that it was repaired almost as soon as it occurred. In addition, in the summer of 2014, £250 was raised from the Neighbourhood Partnership to purchase 12 x 1 metre specially sawn oak feather boards which were used to replace old timbers at the rear of the shelter.

However, at the end of May 2019 extensive damage occurred to a number of the cedar edging shingles, taking four hours to repair and, judging from...
the rubbish littering the shelter, had been caused by individuals returning home via Miss Millies takeaway on Blackboy Hill and consuming food, alcohol, nitrous oxide and drugs on the premises followed by deliberate acts of vandalism. On 31\textsuperscript{st} May 2019 the Chief Constable was contacted with a request for help from the police to find the culprits. This produced a rapid response and Beat Manager PC Steve Harding was assigned to liaise with me.

After May 2019 things quietened down, then on 18\textsuperscript{th} August, the 1\textsuperscript{st} and 2\textsuperscript{nd} September and 14\textsuperscript{th} November more acts of vandalism occurred (see photos attached). Not only was the shelter left in a mess but the vandals seemed to take pleasure in smashing vodka and beer bottles on the pavement by the bus stop and littering the grass beside the shelter. To avoid serious injury to morning joggers and pedestrians and their pets, this was removed and the glass disposed of in the Downs Changing Rooms rubbish bin on the way home. In my opinion, such disregard for the public safety is as serious as the vandalism to the shelter itself and was reported to PC Harding when it happened.

In late September PC Harding was asked if if the Police could provide CCTV coverage near the shelter to observe any criminal activity. This produced a negative response, it being suggested that I contact First Bus CEO James Freeman which I did on the 1st October. Whilst sympathetic, Mr. Freeman said that the shelter was the responsibility of the Downs Committee and should be tackled by them.

The source of the vandalism started to make sense when, during a clear up in late September, I found a Miss Millies receipt timed at 9.20pm among the other rubbish and, by coincidence, a passer-by on the 6\textsuperscript{th} October said he had seen a group of teenagers in the shelter between 9 and 10pm the previous day. On Saturday 19\textsuperscript{th} October I, therefore, decided to investigate these reports and parked my car in the slip-road near the Downs Water Tower so that I could observe anyone in the shelter. True to form, I could see a group of teenagers who, judging from the regular flashes of light from the shelter, were smoking drugs. I then drive round the Triangle and returned via the shelter and, on approaching saw a youth jump up to hit the
edge of the roof tiles, suggesting, with other evidence, that he, or his friends, had been responsible for the vandalism on previous occasions. As I drove slowly by the shelter, about 5 or 6 males and females shouted abuse so I parked in the slip-road again and rang 999 in the hope that I could call out a police patrol car. Sadly, the responding officer said they were busy in the City Centre and I drove home at 10pm having seen no police patrol and with no subsequent follow up from the police.

Having had various communications with the police and, in particular, on Saturday 19th October, I have been frustrated that the criminality and vandalism goes unpunished. However, combining my observations in October and the similarity of each case of vandalism I am certain that the same group of teenagers are responsible for each case, and my clarification of the time slot should be sufficient evidence for the police to tackle the culprits. I, therefore, contacted the Chief Constable again in January 2020 and had feed-back from one of his Inspectors. In addition, a report was presented to the Downs Committee on the 27th January but, sadly, with no follow-up or action on their part.

I have told the police I will revisit the scene once the weather improves to see if, as I suspect, the culprits return and, if so, the police will be contacted and asked to act to avoid any repairs being followed by further acts of vandalism.

I Beattie MBE,

Chairman Sneyd Park Residents Association (1985-1994)
Before and After Restoration in 1991

Repairs Underway
Damage of the 31st May 2019

Finished
Damage of the 14th November 2019
beside recently repaired sections
News: Birdlife

One of the bright sides of the lockdown is the space it has made for wildlife, you may have seen footage of the goats coming down off the hills into the town of Llandudno in North Wales. Meanwhile in Bristol skylarks have been heard singing as they defend territories on the Downs. Please let us know of any other examples of nature returning to the city during the peace and quiet.

News: Downs on Radio 3

FOD+AG member Tim Dowling, recently had his recordings of the dawn chorus played on Radio 3. If you would likely to listen please go to BBC Sounds website or app, select the Radio 3 channel, and the program is ‘Breakfast’ from May 3rd 2020—Tim’s slot was 8.05 to 8.25.

News: Downs Cafe

Following the rejection of the present proposal in November, the owners and the Downs Committee agreed to resubmit the application. As the Downs is common land the request has to go to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, following legal review of a revised proposal.
We are Most Amused.

Overnight it suddenly appeared right on the edge of the Downs, by the drinking fountain on Christchurch Green, a statue of Queen Victoria playing a recorder like piped instrument. Those with good Bristol knowledge will remember that there is already a statue of Queen Victoria in College Green, not to mention the eponymous pub in St. Werberghs. Experts say that it is made of papier-mâché. Despite both this and the presence of the ‘recorder’, schoolchildren are not considered prime suspects and nobody knows the real creator, only that there is a bowl for donations underneath. Please visit, admire and donate. (Photo Credit James Beck / Bristol Post)
Granny Downs: Winter into Spring

I always think that spring should begin either on December 21\textsuperscript{st} when it is supposed to get lighter, or by the very latest January 1\textsuperscript{st}. This means I would be in for disappointment if I didn’t see any signs: so yes, there was a song thrush singing, not a particularly varied repertoire, but a start. A wren was buzzing from one bush to another like an oversized moth (not that that is a sign of spring exactly, more a sign of life). BUT there are celandine leaves.

We could, of course, appreciate winter because, as the late great Robin Tanner said, \textit{winter is full of life if you look for it.}

29th December: a tit congregation including a chaffinch hanger-on. Chaffinches are rare on the Granny Downs. Greenfinches even more so. Goldfinches by the hundreds. Bullfinches nil. Never seen a bullfinch on the Granny Downs, alas.

No redwings in Granny Downs yet but they are on Ladies Mile.

1st January: robins sharp singers today and song thrushes. Dull damp conditions make for resonant birdsong.

8th January: day of the dunnock

9th January: a talent contest of song thrushes

13th January: magpies are having their tails blown over their heads in these gales. It is oddly satisfying to watch as it symbolises the human condition, especially with regard with umbrellas in high winds.

14th January: oh my goodness, a swathe of yellow – dozens of aconites in full flower. Yes, I know they are introduced but we won’t hold that against them.

15 January: wrens the loudest singers – they challenge the roar of high winds in the same way that mistle thrushes do. Once, I was in a clearing in Leigh Woods when a hot air balloon came dangerously low. Alarm calls began and the loudest was the wren. Of course, the balloon picked up height and travelled off, but the wren must have felt satisfied that it could frighten such an enormous predator!

24th January: a loud nuthatch, easy to see. Just look up and wait, they shift about frequently and you can spot them then. This one was preening as well
as calling.

Where there is a nuthatch, there is often a tree creeper, but alas not today.

28th January: look up to see nuthatch and instead, get full on view of great spotted woodpecker in the horse chestnut. So hoping it would drum, but no luck yet! Starlings flying high and fluttering like swifts … extraordinary. Had to do a double take to make sure they weren’t swifts …

1st Feb: sticky buds very shiny and sticky. I seem to remember some bizarre experiment involving putting them in water, turning the light off and watching them shine with a blue light. I think this was in the Esso book of trees … If any reader can illuminate, as it were, please do.

4th February: avian festival! Great tits, nuthatch, great spotted woodpeckers, robins, wren …

7th February: treat! Two nuthatches, lit from below. Oh that wonderful salmon pink!

13th February: bluetits exploring crevices in the walls of the houses alongside the Granny Downs and robins and blackbirds becoming more visible.

16th February: this mistle thrush is on the highest branch of the lime, defiantly tossing its phrases into Storm Dennis …

And today is that special landmark on the way to spring, that day when I can get close enough to a robin to see his beak open in song.

21st February: more and more celandines in flower.

28th February: more rain, dew pond full but oh the blackbird’s morning song!

Note: about greenfinches – it appears that these have become less common because they have been suffering from an affliction of the throat: trichomonosis, which has made it hard for them to swallow. It appears that their numbers are now rising slightly, so we may be luckier soon.
Lightning bolt, things like that

The lightning bolt over Bishopston in February this year took me back to when I saw one on the Downs, and just like the blue gull described in the last issue, no one believed me! I was walking up Ladies Mile on a wild early morning many years ago when I saw a silver bolt hurtle down from the sky and swish down somewhere near Upper Belgrave Road. Then just one thunder clap.

Theories put forward to tell me I didn’t see this were something to do with a barn owl which had luminous wings owing to eating a luminous fungi … (nice one!), and a phenomenon relating to glasses picking up the light from a street lamp. (Really?)

Moving on, then, to Brocken Spectre, seen less than ten years ago, again in Ladies Mile and this time with lots of witnesses and participants. There was sunshine, thick, thick mist and a rainbow around each of us. This continued for a while, stunning, unexpected … Normally this is a mountain phenomenon.

And then the most beautiful of all, as all of us who have seen it will testify: Hoarfrost. Not often seen, a couple of times in the past fifteen years up on the Downs I should think. It is transformative, turning the trees and the grass and just about everything into an ice crystal wonderland. And if it’s seen when the red sun is rising and turning the crystals pink – then wow!
Comments on the Sea Walls Café Proposal

We support the rejection of the proposal for the building of a café at Sea Walls for the following reasons

- The current view should not be interrupted in any way
- A café would encourage more cars with associated parking issues
- There is no guarantee as to the stability of the cliff edge
- Potential pollution of the designated urban dark sky area
- Provision of toilets is not a sufficient reason for addition construction on the Downs
- The proposal would increase the overall footprint of the built environment on the Downs

The Downs, as a resource, needs to be considered in the round taking into account inter alia its considerable contribution to the health of all Bristolians. Given that there already exists a café, toilets and football facilities, albeit of debateable quality, we feel careful consideration should be given to their upgrading since they:

- Are located centrally to Downs as a whole
- Have access to all services of water, sewerage and electricity
- Are served by good public transport

If carefully designed this area could provide:

- improved facilities for the footballers and the public in general
- improved toilet facilities
- an improved café
- a visitors centre
- a bookable public space for events/ art gallery/Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge/etc

We believe, with careful design, all of this could be provided while at the same time reducing the overall footprint of the built environment on the Downs. We would further propose therefore that:

- a thorough review be conducted of the Downs as a resource for the city rather than piecemeal projects such as cycle lanes and pedestrian walkways
Another view

- an overall development plan be produced
- sponsorship be sought for any proposed developments
- an architectural competition be initiated for the development of the area around the water tower that would have in its brief due consideration of “green” initiatives to act as a model for future public space development, e.g. wind and solar energy production, building materials and insulation concerns.

Jack Penrose & Roger Garrett

Letters Page

If you have any comments on the articles published in the Friends of the Downs magazine, Website or Facebook please email us and let us know. We can then publish them in our letters section. We always welcome your views. FOD+AG would also be very grateful for any Downs related articles.

Please email fodagcontent@gmail.com
Fact or Fiction, an Urban Myth

The quote “Never let the truth get in the way of a good story” is often attributed to Mark Twain and the declaration was never truer than in the case of the famous reoccurring urban myth about Bristol Zoos parking attendant. The story is regularly recycled and has been recounted many times.

It concerns the tale about the Bristol Zoo car parking attendant that disappeared one day with 25 years’ worth of takings. It was claimed that the man worked as a car park attendant outside the Zoo, religiously collecting fees from visitors. One day when he didn’t appear. The Zoo rang the City Council to ask if a replacement attendant was to be supplied. This came as a surprise to the council manager as he had always assumed that the attendant was an employee of the Zoo.

The story continues that at this point, both the council manager and the Zoo realised that they may have been scammed and the attendant had in fact been working independently collecting parking fees for himself and now it looked like he had retired with many thousands of pounds and was probably enjoying his retirement on some sunny Costa.

The story gains credence because there could have been some confusion as the car park is on land owned and administered by the Downs committee and rented to the Zoo. Currently Bristol Zoo operates the car park and a further overflow carpark off Ladies Mile.

Nobody knows who started the fable but it may have been an April Fool invention and has been recycled many times, more recently via the internet.

But the story does not end there. Bristol based film maker Paul Holbrook {Skunk Films} is looking to create a comedy series based on this classic urban myth. Established local actor Kerry Howard, the star of Witless and Him & Her, is due to be in the cast, alongside Broadchurch’s Joe Sims in the lead role as the car park attendant, and Jack Ashton, who played Rev Tom in Call The Midwife. The project has the working title Ordinary Joe.

Could it have happened? There is often a grain of truth in such tales but sadly in this case, this is not so. There is no evidence whatsoever

Robert Westlake
Spring on the Downs

Ladybird on Violet (K Taylor) and Pink Hawthorn (Joan Gubbin)
Spring on the Downs

Speckled Wood Butterfly (Caroline Baker) and Apple Blossom (Joan Gubbin)
Bennett’s Patch and White’s Paddock

Bennett’s Patch and White’s Paddock is Avon Wildlife Trust’s nature reserve in Avon Gorge adjoining Bishop’s Knoll and Old Sneed Park reserves.

If you haven’t been there for a while the addition of ‘Ruth’, a 3.5 metre high sculpture, may come as a surprise. She was created in memory of Ruth, the mother of Peter White one of the benefactors that enabled the Trust to acquire the site in 2014 and create the reserve early the following year.

A plaque attached to the sculpture explains, “Ruth is a memorial sculpture celebrating the courage and fortitude shown by the women of Bristol during the Second World War. As thousands of men joined the services, women played a vital role on the home front running households, raising families, recycling materials and cultivating food on allotments and gardens. Throughout the war the cooperation and camaraderie of these women shone through as they faced the daily battle of rationing, cold winters and bombing raids. The efforts of women played a significant part in the allied forces’ eventual victory in 1945. We will always be grateful to them.”

Those of you who have been to the reserve more recently may have noticed that quite a number of trees have been felled. These were common ash. This work has been carried out by Avon Wildlife Trust’s contractors because of potential risks to the public arising from Ash Dieback, (see www.forestresearch.gov.uk or www.woodlandtrust.org.uk ). The large ash trees which have been taken down were in positions on the reserve which
could have affected The Portway, the adjacent Severn Beach line railway, and the footpaths where people walk. Whilst all of the ash trees on the reserve appear to be showing some effects of dieback, to a lesser or greater degree, not all of those removed were in imminent danger of falling or shedding branches. However, AWT considered it prudent and safer in the long-term to remove them in a controlled way rather than risk them falling later.

All our volunteer work on the reserve, like everywhere else, has been halted due to coronavirus but hopefully you are still able to visit and enjoy nature and being outdoors as part of your regular exercise routines during these unusual and worrying times.

There will be lots to see and hear as Spring is now really underway with the trees blossoming, and wildflowers beginning to show throughout the reserve. Birds are currently busy in their breeding season and the first butterflies, such as Brimstone, Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Comma and Orange Tip have been on the wing during warm sunny periods. Newts and frogs have already been active in the ponds and if you look closely you can also see aquatic invertebrates such as pond skaters, back swimmers and whirligig beetles zipping around at the surface. Later this month early dragon and damselflies such as Common Darter, Broad-bodied chaser, Large Red and Common Blue Damselflies will also start to appear.

**Tim Clarke: Volunteer Warden BPWP and FOD+AG member**
Will Coronavirus Change Society?

A big question about the coronavirus pandemic is how much change it will leave in its wake. Are we in the midst of a massive, potentially revolutionary transformation of society? Or are we experiencing an intense but relatively short shock that will change our society in the short term but leave it fundamentally intact?

Over the years historians have identified four critical categories of events that have had the potential to reshape society - lethal pandemics, major wars, state failures, and revolutions. Each of these events, in their own way can level the playing field and pave the way for a new order, but how far-reaching the transformation is depends on what happens in the coming months and how quickly we are able to bounce back.

We may get an effective vaccine in the near future, we may avoid a world-wide depression like the 2008 financial crash, where normal life is disrupted, there's a lot of suffering, but in the end, we gradually return to normal. Inequality in our society and the general electoral preferences of the majority may get tweaked a little, but nothing really changes in any significant way.

The doomsday scenario is that this turns into something much more serious, where we have a hard time getting a handle on dealing with the virus or how we cope with economic repercussions on a global scale. If it turns into something more like the Great Depression, then really all bets are off and the potential for radical sweeping change becomes, much higher.

Should we experience persistent high unemployment and an unsustainable debt, lots of businesses failing and destabilization of the financial sector then we may well see significant levels of state intervention and regulation in the private sector, much more protection for workers who are unemployed or for people who will need help regaining their footing. The health care sector would likely be transformed as it falls under tremendous financial and political pressure.

When we do finally come through this pandemic the government will need to face the other real challenges of the future. What are we going to do about the challenge of artificial intelligence and automation to our jobs, how are we going to deal with the huge problem of our ageing population and
Will Coronavirus Change Society?

social care and what are we actually going to do about saving our planet from climate catastrophe?

Some aspects of the way our government works will need to change fundamentally. But there may be one silver lining, and that will be to shift the focus of politics away from populism and towards greater competence.

Perhaps the Indian author and political activist Arundhati Roy sums it up best.

"Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it." This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next."

Robert Westlake
Interview with Tim Dowling

If you wander across the Downs and near the Gorge you are quite likely to have come across Timothy Dowling. He is a great Downs and FODAG enthusiast and his special subject is.... litter. He, for example, assists Martin Collins by handling the important health and safety briefings for newcomers to Martin’s Deep Litter Clearances.

Are you obsessed with litter?

Not obsessed....just caring about the Downs and the impact on wildlife and other Downs users.

In what ways do you actually litter pick?

I pick if I’m out on my own or my daily walks with Megan the dog. When I lead the Walking for Health Walks I pick as I go and other group members assist with this. I’ve also got a regular session with students from Bristol University. This is just for an hour or so and we meet at the Downs cafe.

That’s not all though, is it?

Well there’s Martin Collins’ deep litter clearances when we investigate bushes and copses and so on. I do the health and safety briefing for those joining us for the first time. I find the DLC sessions thoroughly worthwhile.

Our reporters tell us that you have been known to approach groups or families illegally barbecuing in the wrong area. How do you handle this?

I always adopt a calm approach and talk to them. For example, a lot of what they have with them can be recycled and should be taken home. I have Megan with me and she’s a great ice breaker. I offer the group a rubbish bag if they have not got one.

Any problems?

No – people are generally quite understanding. The worst thing is if they put all their rubbish into a bag and then just leave it – it gets torn apart by squirrels, rats, foxes, magpies, crows and seagulls and then gets scattered. We know that left over barbecue items are dangerous for dogs.
Do you have a favourite area of the Downs. (There is a little thought, now)

*It has got to be Ladies Mile – either side will do. The birdsong there is remarkable especially at dawn when traffic noise is less disturbing.*

**People talk about our parks and open spaces being very important for mental health – do you have a view?**

*You know I do! I think there are three helpful elements with regard to mental health: Music, Walking and Nature and I believe that litter has a negative impact here because people notice litter subconsciously. I don’t believe that you can ‘turn off’ litter without being mentally desensitised in some way.*

**You meet a large number of people on the Downs – do you see anybody else picking litter?**

*There are quite a few people who do that, either when they are walking their dog or just when they are strolling. I know Ellis Brigham outdoor shop organise monthly litter picking groups too.*

[FODAG would like to thank all those people – it certainly helps.]

**Timothy, if you had total power what improvements would you make to the Downs and Gorge?**

*Ideally, I would like to close Ladies Mile to through traffic, so that people could park either side of a barrier but not drive straight through. If closure is not possible, I would like traffic calming measures with squeeze points especially at the two crossing paths and near the junction with Circular Road. People just are NOT sticking to 20 mph.*

**Timothy, thank you so much for sharing your thoughts with Newsletter and sincere thanks for all you (and Megan) do for the Downs and Gorge.**

*Robin Haward*
Commencement of Fixtures

- Following the Durdham Downs Act in 1861, which preserved the Downs as a recreational area for the residents of Bristol, a number of sporting activities were established on the Downs.
- The Downs had already been used for, horse racing, boxing, wrestling, cockfighting, athletics, cricket etc.
- By the turn of the century cricket was played in the summer with football, rugby, hockey and lacrosse being played in the winter.
- Competitive football started around 1890 and in 1896 the first attempt to form a Downs League was made but was unsuccessful.
- By the season 1904/05 there were 7 football clubs from other Bristol Leagues playing their home matches on the Downs.
- In January 1905 a petition was sent to the Lord Mayor, Alderman and Town Councillors requesting that suitable facilities be made available for the large number of sporting activities that were taking part on the Downs.
- On Monday 27th March 1905 whilst the Downs Committee/Baths Committee were considering the petition a more important meeting was taking place at Kingsdown Guild where representatives from 27 local football clubs agreed to establish a league to be played solely on the Downs – the Downs League was thus formed. The request for facilities was denied.

1905 to current day

- The first season started in September 1905 and the League consisted of 3 divisions, each of 10 teams.
- Without access to changing facilities (nor of course the internet or mobile phones), the Bristol Evening News was used to communicate fixtures, results and news to participating clubs. On Saturdays the allocation of pitches for each match was displayed in the window of Gyles Bros at the top of Blackboy Hill who also showed the results that same day.
Past, Present and Future

- Participation in the League has varied between the original 30 teams up to 64 teams over the years but the current number is 43 - 3 divisions of 11 and one of 10.
- Apart from during the two World Wars the League has operated continuously since 1905 until, of course, March this year when all grassroots football was suspended because of the Coronavirus.

Issues currently affecting the League

Reduction in number of Clubs
- During the last 30 years or so the number of teams has reduced from a high of 64 to the current level of 43, although the more manageable number of 56 was accommodated for many years.
- The number of pitches has also decreased from 36 to the currently available 29 of which we use up to 22 each Saturday, in bad weather we liaise with the ground staff to rotate the use of certain pitches.

Reduction in number of Players wishing to commit to playing 11 a-side football on a weekly basis.
- In common with other adult sports, football is competing with many other aspects of life which are attracting people’s time at the weekend, not least work, family commitments, spectator sport and weekend trips away/
- Saturday is no longer etched in people’s diaries for one particular activity and therefore each team requires at least 25 players to enable it to turn out with 11-14 players for each match.

Facilities
- Facilities for 11 a-side football are also reducing and some of those that remain are in a state of disrepair both for pitches and changing rooms.
- The Downs League is fairly unique in that all League matches and League cup matches are played at the same venue and the majority of the teams change in the facilities provided which the players are content with the despite their current condition.
The Downs League

Costs of operating a club

- Whereas the costs of affiliating to the League and the County FA have remained consistent over the years, the costs of pitches, training facilities, insurance etc have risen considerably which means that playing football is no longer an inexpensive pastime.
- Sponsorship for grass roots football is minimal and usually restricted to shirt sponsorship and chips & sausages in a pub after the match.

The future of the Downs League

- We are confident that given the right facilities and league framework 11 a-side adult football will continue to prove a popular activity on a Saturday, although we fully realise that we will have to be flexible in how this is managed.
- The purpose of the Downs League is to provide an appropriate framework for participating in amateur football – there are approximately 1,400 players registered with the League and upwards of 600 involved each matchday.
- The Downs League is well administered and because of the regular meetings (where all clubs are required to attend) communication is extremely good.
- There are about 30 Referees associated with the League, which allows the League to have one of the highest allocation of Referees per match of all Saturday Leagues in Bristol.
- Admittedly the pitches are not as flat as one would like for football; Clubs and players are however fully aware of this and the close relationship with the Downs Ranger and Ground staff ensures pitches are not used if it is likely to damage them.
- Durdham Downs is a wonderful facility for Bristol and it is good to see it being used for so many different events including Concerts, the occasional Circus, Funfairs, Fun runs, Football (both youth and adults), Softball, Quidditch, Fitness programmes, etc.
- The League’s Committee and Downs Committee have been discussing a number of changes to the League if it is deemed
appropriate to do so including:

- Staggered kick off times, allowing for fewer changing rooms
- Accommodating clubs from other Leagues
- Operating a woman’s and youth section
- The League liaises very closely with the Gloucestershire Football Association with regular dialogue relating to the operation of and alternative suggestions for the League.

The current Season

- Strange times indeed, despite losing a number of Saturdays to the wet weather we were still on course to finish this season by 2\textsuperscript{nd} May.
- Following the suspension of fixtures, we proposed various scenarios for how and when to complete the 2019/20 season.
- The FA subsequently decided that the season for all grassroots football should be cancelled, this has clearly raised several issues which we will need to resolve.
- We are now looking forward to the 2020/21 Season with the hope we can start in the first week of September.

Owen Dow

Hon Gen Sec (Bristol Downs League) / GFA Councillor
Bristol is famous for many things, but one of the more unusual news items from last year was a report detailing a daring, dangerous and illegal activity that took place in the Avon Gorge on the 1st April 1979.

Four daredevils jumped off the Suspension bridge as an April Fools stunt and lived to tell the tale. The group took the terrifying 250ft leap from the bridge at 9.30 am after an all-night party.

All four were members of the Oxford Dangerous Sports Club whose only remit was to have as much fun as possible. Expedition leader David Kirke was the first to go over the side and in some style. David wearing top hat and tails and holding a champagne bottle stepped off the bridge attached to the bungee wire. The club had never tested the equipment believing that if they did the stunt would not be classified as dangerous. They had however done their homework and the jump had been worked out mathematically but it still required great courage to attempt such a feat.

On the 21st anniversary of the event David, returned to the scene of the jump at the Clifton bridge to reprise the feat causing great concern to the authorities and to the trustees of Clifton Suspension Bridge who stated that it “does not condone or endorse bungee jumping from the bridge”.

The group had been inspired by Pacific islanders jumping off 80ft wooden towers with just Liana vines attached to their ankles. A ritual to confirm their...
masculinity, improve health and ensure a good harvest.

Friends of the group, alarmed at the prospect of such a dangerous deed informed the local constabulary in the hope that it could be stopped but they were not believed. The police took the view that it was just another April Fool prank. Mr Kirke and his group were however arrested after their jump but let off with a fine.

Robert Westlake

Leaflet Delivery

Friends Of The Downs and Avon Gorge have published a new leaflet in order to promote and increase our membership. We are looking for some help in delivering these to addresses that are close to the Downs and might attract new people to join us.

The next area that we will be focusing on is Clifton. If you have some spare time and would like to help us deliver to about 8 or 10 streets then we would love to hear from you.

Please email me at derekcatterall@hotmail.com and I will deliver the leaflets to you along with the names of the streets we would like you to deliver to.

Many thanks.....Derek Catterall
10 Years of Butterfly Monitoring

As I was asked recently to provide one of our members with a summary of the observations made by our teams of monitors of the local butterfly communities and as we have now built up a 10 year record, it seemed an ideal opportunity to share this with our membership via the newsletter. It also furnishes me with a means of celebrating and paying tribute to our intrepid bands of monitors without whom our outstandingly comprehensive contribution to this exercise in citizen science and to the broader goal of butterfly conservation could not have been achieved. With apologies to anyone who has been a team member for only a short period who has been accidentally omitted.

We are all indebted to the following:


A particular mention has to be made within this second group to Timothy Dowling whose contribution to our efforts and beyond is little short of awe-inspiring.

This data has been accumulated over the last 10 years by members of FOD+AGs Butterfly Monitoring Teams. The data relates to two transects walked on a weekly basis from April 1st to September 29th each year. Their locations are:

1. Clifton and Durdham Downs (C-DD).

2. Walcombe Slade (G&WS), a steep sided valley linking the Downs to the bank of the River Avon and known locally as the Gully.

A summary of the data and findings is shown over the next couple of pages. Further details are available on the FOD+AG website.
### 10 Years of Butterfly Monitoring

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>C-DD</th>
<th>G&amp;WS</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>C-DD</th>
<th>G&amp;WS</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>623</td>
<td>955</td>
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<td>702</td>
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<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>576</td>
<td>1135</td>
<td>1711</td>
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<td>890</td>
<td>1582</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Some noteworthy observations which emerge from the data are:

1. Butterfly numbers fluctuate wildly from year to year. Several factors play into this pattern – most notably environmental temperatures, percentage cloud cover, wind speed & direction and the interaction between weather conditions & butterfly life cycles. The overall annual differences are clearly evident here, although not the effects of seasonal variations for which more detailed data is available on our website.
10 Years of Butterfly Monitoring

2. Over the past 10 years 33-37 of the 59 native UK butterfly species have been recorded on at least one occasion each year, but the number of species commonly observed has remained relatively stable.

3. What has changed over this period includes the following:
   
   - A measure of diversity of species has declined in the Walcombe Slade transect (G&WS) where, in addition to the factors outlined in point 1 above, the presence since 2011 of a mini-herd of feral Kashmiri goats as a part of a conservation project to restore a calcareous meadow flora has resulted in significant habitat change. This has been associated with a reduced abundance of Vanessid species, in particular the Small Tortoiseshell, already a cause for concern due to climate change.
   
   - The communities of butterflies in the 2 transects, in 2010 markedly different, have become more alike. This change too, although by somewhat different means, has been the result of a programme of selective scrub clearance as part of the Downs Management Plan. In this respect both transects now display a broadly meadow butterfly community. Although this might develop further, at present it represents another decline in diversity.
Amongst species that have apparently disappeared over the same 10 year period are from the Downs transect (C-DD) the Wall Brown and : from the Gully transect, the Green Hairstreak. It is too early to judge at present how serious this might be, but 2 iconic blue species – the Small Blue and the Chalkhill Blue are also a recent cause for concern.

4. I have titled the data in the second of the attached graphs “A measure of Diversity” as it has not yet been properly subjected to statistical analysis. However it is apparent that as regards numbers of species there have every year been more in the Gully than on the Downs and that the difference has declined in recent years. The original difference was I believe due to a difference in ambient temperature with the Gully averaging around 1.5°C higher. This makes it more likely that the closer similarities between the two communities (see 3b above) are the result of greater habitat conformity. In conclusion the changes in the flora of the Gully due to goat browsing and human enhanced management intervention might in due course lead to a more established development of the butterfly community, eg the recent increase in Viola spp could encourage an increase in number and diversity of Fritillary butterfly species. Time will tell but meanwhile the natural world will no doubt continue to come up with surprises!

Martin Collins
Noticeboard: Events

Butterfly Monitoring and Goat Monitoring: If you would like to get involved please email: martinandglen@hotmail.com.

Francis Greenacre Illustrated Lecture: Wednesday September 23rd 7.00 p.m. at Redland Friends Meeting House Hampton Road.

AGM: Wednesday 18th November 2020 7.00pm. Redland Green Bowls Club (Please note this was incorrectly stated as September in the Winter Newsletter.)

ALL EVENTS SUBJECT TO CONFIRMATION DUE TO COVID-19
COMMITTEE:
Robert Westlake (Chair), Martin Collins, Derek Catterall, Terry Hannan, Joan Gubbin, Robin Haward, Bob Bell, Caroline Baker, Tim Clarke & Luke Hudson.

SECRETARY: Jac Solomons

KEY CONTACTS:
Membership: Joan Gubbin
Articles for the Newsletter: Robin Haward / Luke Hudson

Please Note: Deadline for submissions for the Summer edition is 10th July 2020. Articles to robinhaward@blueyonder.co.uk or fodagcontent@gmail.com.

Subscriptions: £10.00 per individual or £19.00 per household per calendar year. Please ask for a standing order.

Please go via the website

OR

by post: The Membership Secretary, 3 Wallcroft, Durdham Park, BS6 6XJ.

SOCIAL MEDIA:

Website: http://www.friendsofthedowns.org The website has further information on events and a regular blog on the Downs.

Facebook: Do please join the group on Facebook, and like/share the page to spread the word. @fodagbristol.

Instagram: Friends_of_the_Downs.

Please send any Downs & Gorge photos to fodagcontent@gmail.com.