

# FOD

**Friends of the Downs**

Avon Gorge +

# AG

**Issue 31**

**Winter 2019**



# Chairman's Report January 2019

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Early in January FOD+AG members joined hundreds more for a memorial service at Clifton College Chapel. The occasion; to celebrate the life of founder member and FOD+AG vice chair Richard Bland. Family, friends and colleagues congregated to say a final farewell to a man held in the highest regard. Eloquent testimonies from Richard's family and contemporaries bear testament to the contribution Richard made to many organisations from across the City and beyond.

At our November AGM I detailed some of our priorities for the coming year and beyond. To that end your committee is currently reviewing a whole range of policies, procedures and activities. This is to ensure we remain focused and our efforts are targeted in a productive and professional manner. The outcome of this in-depth analysis will be shared with all our members in the coming months and you will have a chance to comment and contribute. Members can, of course, comment on any Downs related issues via our various social media platforms.

We look forward confidently to a year that may prove to be challenging. Uncertainty about the future of all our public open spaces and how they are to be managed in the future is an enduring concern. The City Council's Parks Department is gearing up to involve much greater volunteer involvement. FOD+AG looks forward to playing a significant role in ensuring that the Downs remains a premier destination for locals and visitors alike.

As part of the ongoing evolution of the Downs, we have published details in this newsletter of various proposals currently under consideration; a new pedestrian island on Stoke Road, a proposed cycle loop, and more details of the Sea Walls café. As ever we would love to hear your feedback.

Please see our website for details of all our forthcoming events and activities.

**Robert Westlake**

*(Cover Photo: Derek Catterall)*

# **Memories of Richard Bland**

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Twenty years ago I was filming the Clifton Suspension Bridge for a documentary about the Avon Gorge. I was setting up my tripod across from the Observatory rock slide and got into conversation with a passer-by. He was handsome and distinguished-looking, and his binoculars marked him out as a naturalist. I had lots of questions for him and he was happy to provide answers. He pointed out plants at our feet and offered to meet me the following morning in Leigh Woods to show me features of this ancient woodland. His advice was invaluable and I returned to the woods several times to film aspects he'd indicated in best light.

My planned Avon Gorge film was postponed while I concentrated on one about Brunel's bridge and, years later, it was resurrected. I contacted my helpful guide and filmed him at Sea Walls describing the bird life of the Avon Gorge and its climatic variations.

The film is screened regularly at public gatherings. That tall, distinguished-looking man, with his enthusiasm and encyclopaedic knowledge of nature's place in our city, continues to inform and enrich lives.

**Gordon Young**

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I knew Richard for 50 years and have many happy memories of our association. In particular, I think of his kindness a few years ago when he led a very large group around the trees on the Granny Downs. It was part of the Westbury Park Festival and he explained that his "schoolteacher's voice" was no longer powerful but he held us spell-bound for two hours as we followed the stories of our local trees; all told with modesty and simplicity as suited someone whose knowledge was encyclopaedic. Later I wrote to remind him that he hadn't told us his fee and he replied that we owed him nothing because he'd enjoyed the evening and it was a worthy cause and the pension and tax people had been generous to him.

But my abiding memory of Richard has nothing to do with trees except they were the reason we had spent a morning with him near Proctor's Fountain. It was, I think, May 2014 and he was in great form, telling us about various common and rare specimens. Suddenly he electrified us by saying, as he

# Memories of Richard Bland

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pointed to Bridge Valley Road, "That is the most important road, historically, in the whole of Britain." Was he mad?

Not at all! He proceeded to tell us the story of John Loudon Macadam who was appointed Surveyor to the Bristol Turnpike Trust in 1816. The trustees wanted him to construct a new road from Hotwells beside the river to the Downs, a road that would be less steep than Granby Hill or Park Street. Macadam was the man for the job. Not only did he build a road that had such a gentle gradient that there was no need to change or rest horses half way; but he experimented with a new method of construction that produced a solid, long-lasting road, well drained and with a usable surface even in winter. Richard explained how the workmen measured the stones in their mouths to get the right size for the bottom layer; then smaller stones were placed on top and the whole was finished with gravel packed tight. The construction was so good that it survived winter rain and frost and the camber meant it was always dry. The result of all this was the famous macadam road. It made a greater difference to the speed of travel than even that between the horse and the steam engine later in the century. It was the greatest advance in road-making since Roman times. The Macadam method was copied all over the world and revolutionised road travel and it all began on Bridge Valley Road.

I can never now travel along that road without thinking of Richard with great affection.

**Barry Williamson**

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When FODAG was formed all those years ago I met Richard ... I just wish I had met him earlier. His enthusiasm for Nature and the Downs especially is legendary. I learned so much from him in a short time – and if you did not remember it all he had given you the stimulus to do some revision and homework. As a fellow committee member he showed us hard work, clear focus and loyalty. He asked me to do several talks for him ... not that he did not want to do them: he was already booked! He was a mine of Downs infor-

## Memories of Richard Bland

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mation and he had a calm respect for the way trends in nature occurred. I remember working with him on the Victorian Steps when a bit of song in the distance elicited "That's a tree creeper!" He was never afraid of hard work and led the FOD+AG Conservation Sunday group with enthusiasm. It is a privilege to be working with Mandy and Jill of the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project to bring to life the Granny Downs tree trail on which he was working. It will be dedicated to his memory.

**Robin Haward**



*In memory of Richard we have reprinted an interview on his thoughts on the Downs and Bristol that he did with Robin Haward in Feb 2015 - please see page 18.*



## **Bristol Tree of the Year**

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In the last newsletter we encouraged members to vote for the Bristol Tree Forum 'Tree of the Year'. Sadly the award did not go to a tree on the Downs, although it was close, the award going to the Lucombe Oak in Stoke Park, just to the north of the Downs.

The Lucombe Oak is a cross between a Turkey Oak and a Cork Oak. It was first raised by an Exeter nurseryman, William Lucombe, in 1762. It is unusual in the fact that it keeps its leaves over winter. The story goes that William Lucombe was so attached to his special oak that he felled the original specimen to provide wood for his own coffin and kept the boards under his bed until he died. However, he lived an exceptionally long life, dying at the age of 102 years, by which time the planks had decayed in the Devon damp. To quote an article from Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew, this showed 'that Lucombe knew more about growing trees than preserving them'. On his death timber from one of his early propagations was used to make his coffin instead.

**Luke Hudson**



*The Lucombe Oak in Stoke Park*

# Clifton Cycle Loop Proposal

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Vicki Cracknell of Cycle Sunday and I have begun working on ways to improve paths on the Downs, to make them more friendly and accessible for both people on bikes and also others with wheels: disability vehicles, wheel-chairs, prams etc. Starting from the previously commissioned 2015 Downs “Place and Movement Framework”, we’ve produced the attached proposal, as a starting point for discussion with the Downs Committee. We hope from this to have encouragement to work it up into a more detailed plan, and eventually, if planning is granted, to fundraise for its implementation.

## **Our main principles:**

The Downs are for all of us. There should be shared use of any new paths, so they benefit walkers and runners, as well as people on bikes – and so they need to be wide enough.

Design, surfaces, signs etc must all be in sympathy with the landscape and history – we don’t want new grey tarmac, curbs or ugly signs. We are keen not to alter the beautiful semi-rural landscape and feel of the Downs. Paths must be gravel or buff surfaced.

Emphasis is on access, and on low speed leisure and family cycling, rather than the faster commuters and sports cyclists, (who we know tend to want to stay on the roads anyway.)

Traffic calming measures on Circular Road, and a zebra crossing on Stoke Road – these additional changes would improve the Downs for pedestrians and cyclists.

**Johnny Wood**

# Proposed New Cycling and Pedestrian Path

Cycle Sunday, January 2019

*"There is an appetite to develop utility and recreational cycling and pedestrian access to the Downs, including options to reconfigure the highways and changes to the open Downs by enhancing existing facilities and creating new ones. The result should be greater connection with the city, enhanced user experience, as well as contributing to reduced car dependence."*

Downs Committee Draft Vision, March 2016.

## Clifton Downs: A new approach to sharing space

This proposal outlines a car-free leisure loop around the Downs for walkers, runners, people riding bikes, and those using wheel chairs, mobility vehicles or prams. The loop would involve adding a section of new shared-use path, reconstructing the path next to Ladies Mile and reconfiguring Circular Road. It would improve access to, and enjoyment of, the Downs by all those who would like to explore it without needing a car, thereby encouraging active leisure and reducing congestion.

The proposed loop would be 2.3 miles in length and would run along Rockleaze and Downleaze, Circular Road, Ladies Mile and a short section of Stoke Road.

### Why it is needed?

The popularity of the Downs as a place to visit, walk, run and cycle is well established. This popularity does lead to a number of management issues including erosion, as people follow "desire lines".

The success of Cycle Sunday over the past four years and increase in popularity of cycling in Bristol both point to an unmet demand for greater safe access to the Downs by bike. A new leisure loop would also complement the proposal to build a café at the Sea Walls, encouraging people to arrive at the café on foot or by bike thereby helping to reduce motor traffic.

The scheme fits well with the aims of Bristol City Council in terms of improving public health and sustainable transport.

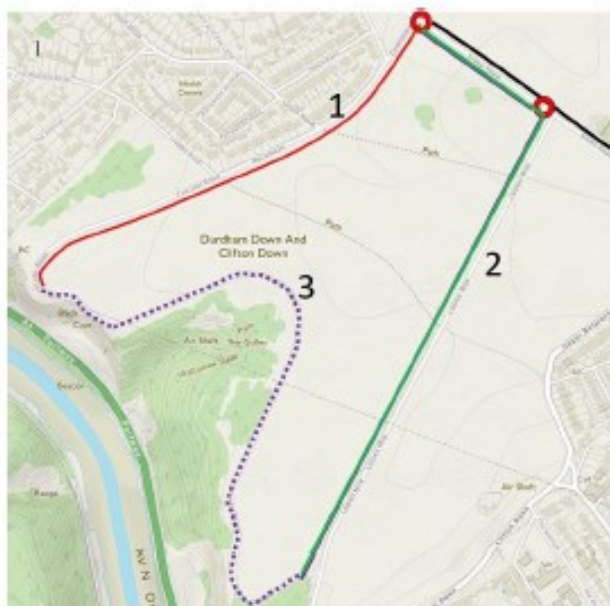


Figure 1 Map of proposed loop



## Proposed New Cycling and Pedestrian Path

Over the past few years, the Downs Committee has discussed options for improved pedestrian and cycling access to the area for the people of Bristol, but until now with no tangible outcomes.

There are shared-use leisure paths in comparable large parks elsewhere in the country. For example, Richmond Park, which now has a seven-mile shared path which runs near its perimeter. It was designed for recreation and with consideration for the landscape of the historic park.



Figure 2 Richmond Park

## The Proposal

With sensitive attention to design, particularly signage and surfacing, the leisure loop could be developed in keeping with the landscape and ecology of the Downs, significantly enhancing the experience of those visiting it. The loop can be described in three sections:

## Section 1: Downlease and Rocklease to the Seawalls.

Formalising the existing "desire line" made by walkers and runners, this would be a new 1km shared-use path, parallel to Rockleaze and Downleaze and leading to the Seawalls. For people with prams and those in wheelchairs, this would provide a safer and more attractive alternative to the footpath along Downleaze and Rockleaze which has many driveways and two roads to cross.

At the Seawalls, dropped kerbs would enable cyclists to join Circular Road and help people with prams and in wheelchairs to cross to the existing footpath on the other side of the road.

The path would be 3m wide to accommodate both pedestrians and people on bikes. Signs would make it clear that this was a shared space.



Figure 3. Downlease and Rocklease



If the path were built from tarmac with a buff coloured high friction surface, the cost to build this section would be approximately £150,000. This surface would be hard wearing and sympathetic to the locality.

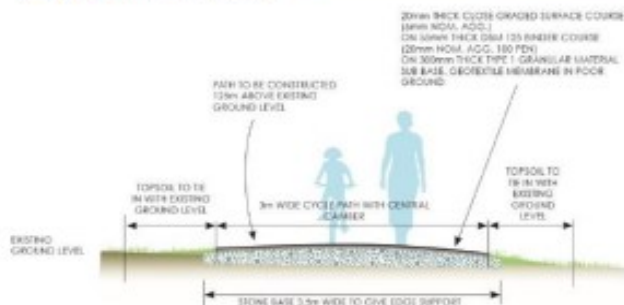


FIGURE 4. PROPOSED DATA CONSTRUCTION

# Proposed New Cycling and Pedestrian Path

## Section 2: Ladies Mile and Stoke Road

The existing, uneven path on the west side of Ladies Mile could be reconstructed to form a shared-use path for pedestrians and cyclists. Its design could reference the promenade feel of the avenue and the path could be routed to minimize the need to cut down scrub or trees. Its design and construction would mirror that of the path alongside Downleaze and Rockleaze.

Finally, the broad footpath along the south side of Stoke Road would be widened and made into a shared-use path. This would join up with the Rockleaze section of the loop. Construction costs for this section of the loop would be approximately £190,000.

## Section 3: Circular Road.

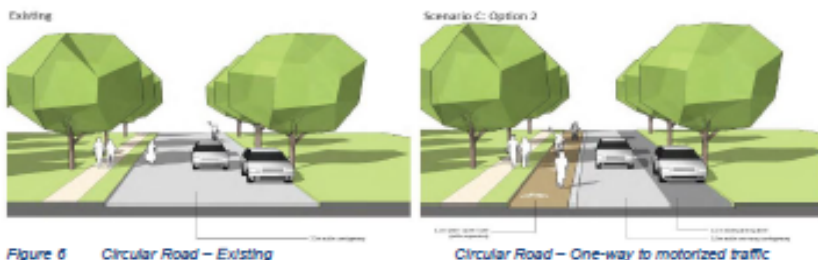
Our ambition is for Circular Road to complete the leisure loop. There are a range of options:

- Car-free Sundays (temporary closures of Circular Road)
- Physical traffic calming measures
- Circular Road being made one way
- Closing Circular Road (keeping vehicle access to the Seawalls from Rockleaze)

One-way option: Changing the road priority to make it one way for motor traffic would free-up existing road space to allow a two-way segregated cycle route with no new hard surfaces. The current parking would be retained. A good quality pavement for pedestrians already exists along Circular Road. Decisions about the direction of traffic flow would be based on traffic assessments of current usage of the road and suitability of the junctions at either end.



Figure 6 Ladies Mile



Traffic calming: There have been on-going concerns about some drivers speeding on Circular Road. In order to enforce the 20-mph limit, physical traffic calming measures could be installed. One example would be flat top speed tables that are effective at slowing cars as it is not possible to "straddle" them.

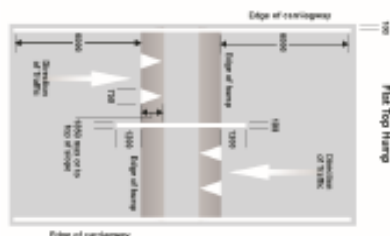


Figure 7 Flat Top Speed Table

# **Proposed New Cycling and Pedestrian Path**

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## *Zebra Crossing on Stoke Road*

The two sides of the Downs are currently separated by Stoke Road. Its traffic volumes, high kerbs and parked cars make crossing difficult. Many people do cross Stoke Road near the Water Tower/Café Retreat despite the lack of a crossing. A zebra crossing could be installed near the top of Ladies Mile and would make a great difference to accessibility. A zebra crossing with beacons would cost approximately £20,000.

## *Bike Hire*

The Downs is a city-wide resource. We are proposing a bike hire business at the Water Tower/Café Retreat. This would enable people to arrive by bus on Stoke Road and then explore the Leisure Loop on a hired bike. We have been speaking to Jake Voelcker from Bristol Bicycles (some of you may have ridden one of their bikes at our Cycle Sunday events). They are very interested in working with the management of Café Retreat on a joint venture.

## *Next steps*

We are really pleased to have the opportunity to present this proposal to the Downs Committee and would welcome the opportunity to have a more in-depth discussion with members of the Place and Movement sub-group at their next meeting.

We are working with Greenways and Cycleroutes Ltd on this proposal. It is a charitable community benefit society. It supports groups like Cycle Sunday to develop new walking and cycling paths and was founded by John Grimshaw and Caroline Levett (Former Chief Executive and longstanding board member of Sustrans respectively). John has engineered many traffic free paths, starting with the Bristol and Bath railway path back in 1979. Brean Down Way and Waddesdon Greenway (near Aylesbury) are two recent completed projects.

Greenways can help us get this proposal developed and ready for planning. They have a proven track record for fundraising for projects such as this one and we will work with them to secure a small grant for the development phase and larger capital grants for the build.

## References

City Design Group: *Downs Place and Movement Framework*. November 2015. Figures 2,3,6

Department for Transport: *Local Transport Note 07/1 - Traffic Calming*. March 2007. Figure 7

Greenways and Cycleroutes Ltd <https://greenwaysandcycleroutes.org/become-a-supporter/>

<http://www.johngrimshawassociates.co.uk/> Figures 1 & 4

Sustrans: *Cycling on Clifton and Durdham Downs*. June 2014

This proposal was written by Vicki Cracknell and Johnny Wood (Cycle Sunday) with advice from Greenways and Cycleroutes and from Sustrans.

## The Avenue to Nowhere: Response

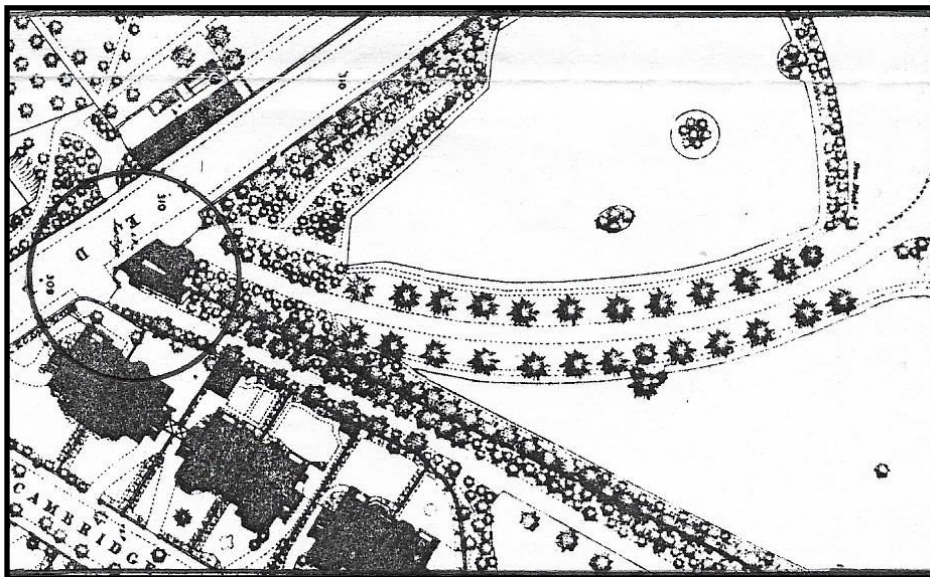
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*Following Jeff Bishop's article in the Autumn newsletter regarding the mysterious Avenue to Nowhere across the Granny Downs (Does anyone know the origin of the name 'Granny Downs'?) we had a response from another FOD+AG member Barry Williamson with another suggestion for the origin of the mystery avenue.*

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Jeff Bishop's article, "The Avenue To Nowhere" in the last newsletter has stimulated a good deal of discussion. His theory that the so-called avenue across the Granny Downs might be a grand entrance to Redland Lodge, via Field 471, does not seem to me to be at all possible.

Firstly, I would question whether the "Avenue" is an avenue in the generally accepted meaning of a drive to a grand house, lined by regularly spaced



1882 Bristol Town Plan

trees. I think the path across the Granny Downs has always been only a walking path, (it is 9ft at maximum width) and the trees are irregularly spaced. Nothing there to impress visitors and hardly room for a chaise or carriage. On the 1882 OS Plan of Bristol, drawn in astonishing detail at 10.56 ft to 1 mile, the avenue is a narrow path, only one third the width of the drives or avenues to nearby big houses.



## **The Avenue to Nowhere: Response**

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My other reasons for doubting Jeff's "likeliest explanation" are:

There is a grand entrance, with gatekeeper's lodge (essential if you were trying to make a statement about your status) to Redland Lodge marked on the 1882 Plan. This shows every tree and built feature and there is no doubt that the entrance to the mansion was then on Redland Road next to the edge of Cambridge Park where No 131 Redland Road now stands. There was another drive leading to Redland Knoll next to the one above and the curving wall at the entrance to the double drive still exists quite clearly. The left hand drive opens out all around Redland Lodge on the west and east sides. The formal entrance was on the west and there was no drive to the north side.

According to the 1881 Census Enumerators' Books there were 62 children between the ages of 5 and 10 in Etloe, Berkeley, Albert and Victoria roads (school attendance was made compulsory between the ages of 5 and 10 in 1880 and raised to 11 in 1893). There was no school in Westbury Park until 1893 when the present school was built. The children of school age attended St John's School at the top of Blackboy Hill and walked across the Granny Downs by the path under discussion.

In the 1970s I collected the memories of old people who had known Westbury Park all their lives and been born in the 1870s and 1880s. Mrs Collingwood who was born in the 1880s told me that the Granny Downs were not really Downs but the site of clay pits and deep excavations for making bricks. She said these Downs were "full of humps and bumps" which made them a good place to play hide and seek in summer. When there was rain, the whole area flooded, as happens now, and walking across was difficult. So the "ash path" or the "cinder path" was constructed as a sort of causeway across the Granny Downs to make them safe for children to walk to school when wet. The trees were planted at the same time to mark the path. Bert Spiller and Mrs Bunting both corroborated Mrs Collingwood's memories.

Age of the trees alongside the path? I'm not sure how precisely trees can be dated but if they were planted when the path was laid down they would now be nearly 150 years old. Does a Downs Ranger's Planting book exist in the archives so we establish an accurate date?

Therefore, my conclusion is that the "avenue" was not the route to Redland Lodge but a safe path across bumpy terrain.

**Barry Williamson**



# **Pedestrian Island for Stoke Road**

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I am the scheme coordinator for the Downs Walking Group. I have been involved in leading walks over the Downs since September 1992, initially whilst I was working in NHS mental health services based at Grove Road Day Hospital in Redland. Our walking group linked with the Walking for Health Initiative (WfH) from 2006 onwards and in February 2012 we became fully integrated with the Bristol City Council supported WfH scheme.

I am writing this proposal because I have been very concerned about the increased safety issues when crossing Stoke Road by Café Retreat next to the water tower. Crossing Stoke Road worsened significantly following the introduction of the yellow line on the western side of the road in 2016, as the traffic now moves that much more quickly along this busy road.

Stoke Road has a 30mph speed limit; it might help to extend the 20mph until just beyond the traffic lights at the junction with Saville Road, but I am aware that further speed limits remain controversial, and seemingly difficult to enforce in practice. Therefore, the best solution would be a pedestrian island in the middle of Stoke Road opposite Café Retreat, as this would enable pedestrians to cross the road in two parts. This is a much cheaper option than building a pelican or zebra crossing, which would create light-pollution.

## **1. Safety for pedestrians**

First and foremost, this would make it safer for pedestrians crossing the road at this point. This is a busy pedestrian crossing route. There are traffic light crossings at the start of Stoke Road (near top of Blackboy Hill) and also at the junction with Saville Road, but in practice the busiest pedestrian crossing route is opposite the café. Obviously, this is well used by the Downs Football League and the many children's footballing groups, as well as the Downs Walking Group, Nordic walkers, joggers, runners, and other local sporting activities. Safe crossings need to be where people actually cross the road.

## **2. Disabled access**

As well as safety, the proposal would make it would easier for pedestrians to cross and help with disabled access. The island would enable a dropped curb to be created on the western side of Stoke Road, where the curb is particularly steep. The pavement on the western side is unusually wide and

## **Pedestrian island for Stoke Road**

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so would allow a dropped curb to be incorporated without taking away too much pavement. The road may need to divert slightly to allow the central island to be built, although there should be room for an island without this needing to happen, and a narrow road helps with traffic calming. There would be fewer parking spaces on the eastern side of Stoke Road, but hopefully not too many places would be lost. The current disabled parking space by the café would need to be moved, but this should not be too problematical.

### **3. Traffic calming**

The construction would help reduce traffic speeds, without the need for a lower speed limit, and benefit pedestrians crossing all along Stoke Road. This will need to be monitored to see if speed continues to be an issue.

### **4. More welcoming central point for the Downs**

The construction of the island might form part of a larger scheme to help create a welcoming area for the Downs, with Café Retreat as central to this idea. I do think that the construction of an awning (like similar awnings in other areas) might help increase the capacity for the café, as currently it can be very crowded inside in wet weather. This proposal has been discussed with FOD+AG at their recent committee meeting and was unanimously supported.

### **Calming the traffic on Ladies Mile**

Although there is a 20mph speed limit along the whole of Ladies Mile, this remains unobserved by most vehicles, making it hard for pedestrians to cross the road that cuts through the middle of the main Downs. One solution would be to create narrowing points so that traffic would regularly have to slow down naturally to a single lane. In addition this might reduce the use of Ladies Mile as a 'rat-run'. The most suitable points for these narrowing points would be:

Stoke Road end by the eastern crossing path from Blackboy Hill - Julian Rd.

At the western crossing path - from Worrall Road towards Ivywell Road.

By the dog-waste bin (at the end of the avenue of trees from the Old Halt towards Ladies Mile)

At the junction with Circular Road. (There would be a case for creating three points here so pedestrians can cross both Ladies Mile and Circular Road).

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**Tim Dowling**

# Gully Yew Wood Project - Update

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Following my article in Newsletter 29 (Summer 2018), FOD+AG have been pleased with the correspondence which it generated and hope that it will encourage others to broaden the opinions presented to the membership by this means.

A summary of my responses to the questions raised, together with further background for which I am grateful to our correspondents follows. For a more detailed review please see our website.

- The Downs Management Plan referred to can be found at: [www.bristol.gov.uk/documents/20182/32863/The-Downs\\_v3.pdf](http://www.bristol.gov.uk/documents/20182/32863/The-Downs_v3.pdf)
- To the best of my knowledge the review of the goat project scheduled for 2015/6 has never been published, nor completed;
- The documents sent to the Downs Management Steering Group are now available on the FOD+AG website, having not been published previously awaiting consideration by the steering group; The steering group has not responded and indeed has met only intermittently since that time.
- The name Walcombe Slade derives from Saxon/Early English – *eow* meaning yew, and *cwm* meaning wooded valley – bearing witness to the antiquity of the Yew Wood at this site.
- In the absence of any protection of the living yew trees which have so far survived goat-browsing, the use of some dead specimens for tree sculpture would at least preserve a tenuous link with its heritage.
- Potential soil erosion with the loss of the canopy is, of course, speculative but remains a risk that should not be ignored.
- The nature of the ground cover plants to consolidate the soil would certainly not constitute a calcareous meadow community.
- Some monitoring of the evolving plant community in the Gully has been carried out by the late, lamented Richard Bland as a part of his and FOD+AGs voluntary programme and also, I believe by local expert Libby Houston.

## **Gully Yew Wood Project - Update**

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- The suggestion that ecological monitoring should be a research project overseen by an academic consortium might well grow out of the initiatives above together with an Engaged Learning Project involving FOD+AG and Bristol University Geography Department. This latter has been proposed, and is due to start in January 2019, although once again neither BCC nor Natural England has responded to repeated requests for permission / approval for this non-intrusive soil-based investigation.
- Neither of our two major correspondents was enthusiastic about a sculpture trail, one preferring a fully wild landscape and the other being nervous and circumspect about the prospect.
- Without rehearsing my arguments again, the latter does, however, ignore both the educational potential of this development of the site and also its contribution to the heritage of the site whether ecological or human.
- Since the original proposal was submitted I have met with Ben Skuse, area supervisor for the Downs, and Mandy Leivers, Education Officer for the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project, whose reservations about a Sculpture Trail in the Yew Wood will be included in an article in the next Newsletter.

As a result of all of these contributions to the debate I have formulated a new proposal which addresses as many of the concerns expressed as possible, and this will appear in the next newsletter. The main ambition of the modified proposal would be to develop a small 'outdoor classroom' with opportunities for the study of meadow plants, invertebrate animals and log-pile microhabitats. Simultaneously to encourage children and adults to observe, examine and appreciate animal sculptures in the woods, illustrating wildlife species native to this area - as well as experiencing the beauty of wood as a material for creative art work.

**Martin Collins**

## **Interview with Richard Bland - Feb 2015**

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Newsletter found Richard at home. Richard had recently been given a Life-time Achievement Award by the Bristol Natural History Consortium – there was a range of criteria involved including a one minute film about Richard. So CONGRATULATIONS. Richard says calmly “ I organise surveys ... about 550 people send records in for the recent bird atlas.” FODAG members also know that if you want to know anything about the Downs Richard is the man to ask. His knowledge covers an extremely wide range too.

### ***When did you first fall in love with the Downs?***

1961 when I first came to Bristol.

Richard has always been fascinated by nature since his school days at Marlborough and his University days at St John's College. He started his regular walks in those early days in Bristol and they have continued to the present.

### ***Which quality of the Downs is your favourite?***

Continuity of use ... the Downs have been grazed for probably 2,000 years.

### ***A favourite tree?***

Difficult to choose: there's a large leaved lime on the Granny Downs ... or the 350 year old Hawthorn near the gully.

### ***Outstanding bird moment?***

That has to be on Portland Bill when I was in the Navy and happened to be with the warden: Britain's 4<sup>th</sup> only black wheatear .... and then spotted from my room at Clifton College a migrating wheatear that spent all day on the New Field.

Richard continues to learn about the Downs and Gorge all the time. He's fascinated by the many rare plants that can be found at one site only; the wood anemone near the Peregrine Watch Point is a good example.

His Sunday 'transect' walk, started in 1994, still leads to new discoveries each year. He loves the Downs & Gorge equally and is gripped by the Avon tides and the whitebeams. He has a mass of data from his weekly walks for



## **Interview with Richard Bland - Feb 2015**

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the British Trust for Ornithology which have plotted the complex population changes of the area's birds.

### ***Advice to the Downs Committee?***

Visit the Downs ... get to know it.

### ***City Council?***

Good that they are not mowing too much ... but they will have to do something about the scrub.

### ***Any sadness about the Downs?***

Well ... the zoo parking ... the groove worn by the runners ... making damage good but with the wrong soil.

### ***What would you whisper into the giant ear of the general public?***

Take your rubbish with you.....make yourself open to the wonders which exist on the Downs.

**Robin Haward**



## St Vincent's Spring in World War II

In the steeply sloping woodland of the Avon Gorge, an impressively large iron tank is hidden away, about 200 metres south of the Gully (Figure 1). It stands around 2 metres high and has a capacity of 2,300 litres. The riveted construction suggests a late 19<sup>th</sup> century date, according to members of Bristol Industrial Archaeology Society ('BIAS'). However, it may have arrived much later, since there are signs of adaptation from a previous use.



*Figure 1: The Iron Tank*

In many parts of the country such a tank would imply collection of water from higher up the hill, but the immediate surroundings are dry limestone. Instead, pipes go down from the tank,

which is close to a cutting that drops down to the Portway. If one walks beside the Portway, it is hard to see these pipes, because the vegetation is so dense. Figure 2 shows a photograph taken in 2011, when all this growth had been cut away. The tank is directly above the non-functional drinking fountain of St Vincent's Spring. Pipes emerge from behind the fountain, they seem to be in two pairs, suggesting at least two tanks existed when the system was in use.

The drinking fountain has a slot for a hand-pump, implying that the spring is underground. In research on this site I became aware of a St Vincent's Spring Cave, accessed from behind the fountain. An online search led to references in caving journals, so I asked the University of Bristol Speleological Society for help. This led to an invitation to be escorted inside. Much of the cave dates back to an 18<sup>th</sup> century spa known as the New Hotwell, as I

## St Vincent's Spring in World War II

shall describe in a future article. All I need explain is that an initial steep access (4 metres) leads to a passage going into the hill (10 metres), with a well at its end (7 metres deep) and the spring in a natural chamber at its foot. A largish pipe (5cm in diameter) runs up from the spring to a mechanical pump at the foot of the steep access. It was very rusty, but we could just make out the name 'Oil-Rite'. According to Dave Hardwick of BIAS, Oil-Rite pumps were made in the US from 1933. A similar model was advertised in 1937, (see figure 3). In caving papers from the 1960s, I have found mention of a rusty shed immediately above the fountain. The shed housed a petrol-driven engine which was connected to the pump by a belt. The action of the pump included a suction component, so it could not be too far above the spring.



*Figure 2: Fountain and Pipes  
(Francis Greenacre)*

The older records of Bristol Waterworks were deposited in Bristol Archives in 1994, in big leather-bound minute books for weekly board meetings. In the minutes for 1941 I found much discussion of damage by enemy action and other impacts of the war, and the following entry (1<sup>st</sup> August 1941):

‘The Engineer reported a conversation with the City Engineer on the preparations to be made for defending the City in the event of invasion and of Bristol being besieged.’

Depending on the front line, the besieged city might have no access to

## St Vincent's Spring in World War II

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water from Blagdon Lake, or sources in Gloucestershire. The River Avon is tidal and also likely to be polluted by sewage. In a sustained siege, sources of drinking water in the city could be crucial, as explained in a company history:

'During the summer of 1941 Bristol was divided into five defence zones, each with a defence committee. ... The Company was represented on each committee, its major task being to provide emergency drinking water supplies should mains supplies be cut off. Many old wells were overhauled and fitted with hand pumps and disinfection equipment. Larger wells and boreholes were provided with mechanical plant. ... 29 wells were operational by the end of the year and a further 62 wells ... by the following February.

*(The Story of Bristol Waterworks Company 1939-1991, A. Hodgson, 1991)*

Almost certainly, St Vincent's Spring would be one of these larger wells. However, the only direct mention that I have found is a strange footnote:

'St Vincent's Fountain was broken as a result of enemy bombing and has ceased to run, in common with St Mary Redcliffe Pipe

*(The Bristol Waterworks Company, 1846-1946)*

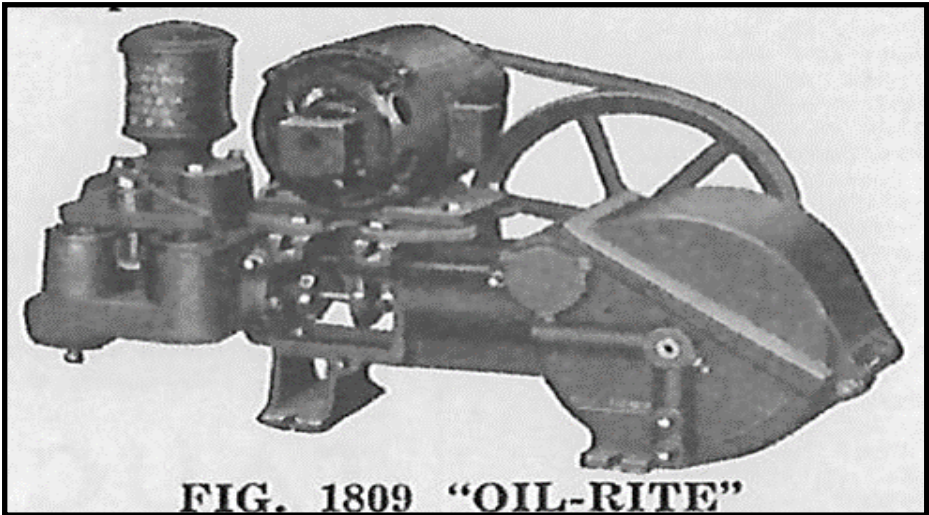
The St Mary Redcliffe Pipe ran close to the surface, so was vulnerable, but the fountain at St Vincent's Spring could only be disabled by a direct hit, for which there is no evidence.

The responsibility for the wells was shared with the City Engineer, suggesting that Bristol City Council may hold further records. However, the only relevant archive from the City Engineer's office that I have seen is a plan of the cave made in March 1950. There were then two pipes from the spring. The mechanical pump is mentioned, but there was also a smaller pipe leading to the hand pump for the drinking fountain; this has disappeared, perhaps taken for its lead.

The US origin of the pump is intriguing, in time of war could it have been supplied under Lend-Lease, which started in 1941? Any information on the spring in WW2 will be of interest. This industrial archaeology could only



## St Vincent's Spring in World War II



*Figure 3: Oil-Rite Pump, from a 1937 Catalogue*

survive in such a neglected spot. An unusual reminder of a desperate phase in WW2. The air raids were bad enough, but measures were being taken for a grimmer eventuality. our city besieged - like Stalingrad. **Paul Wood**





# **Memoirs of a Goat Monitor**

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Late last year one of our goat monitoring volunteers came across an unusual sight when carrying out an early morning patrol.

The Downs were still and eerily quiet that morning as Robert Westlake set off on a regular patrol of the goat compound. It was just after first light, the Gully was clothed in hanging mist so finding the goats might take a bit longer. They do have favourite places but this cannot always be relied on. Luckily twenty minutes later all four goats were spotted browsing quietly near the lower footpath. Robert continued with his normal routine of observing the goats, checking for any sign of illness or injury. All was well, they remained relaxed, appeared in fine fettle, well fed and sturdy. The rest of the patrol ensured that all gates and fences were in good order and drinking water available. Last job check for litter and off for breakfast.

Robert continues, "Satisfied all was well I was returning to the main gate to leave the compound when I received a bit of a shock. In a wooded part of the Gully I spotted what I thought was discarded rubbish. As I drew closer the rubbish seemed to take on a more distinct form. I continued my approach, intent on removing the offending article and still trying to distinguish exactly what it was. It was at this point that speculation turned to concern. To my amazement I was seeing what to all intents and purpose appeared to be a naked baby sat atop an old tree stump. Something not quite right here I thought to myself, surely it can't be, I mused, as I hastened forward with thoughts of emergency assistance and what further action might need to be taken. I was approximately fifteen yards away, and it was only then and with some relief that I discovered the 'baby' to be a plastic doll that had been carefully located on top of the stump, which in turn had then been encircled with a ring of stones. Why and who would have done such a thing? Was this part of some symbolic satanic ritual? We shall probably never know" asserted Robert. "Most likely a bit of a prank designed to amuse rather than anything more sinister".

**If you are interested in finding out more about becoming a goat monitor please contact us via the FOD+AG web page.**

## **Memoirs of a Goat Monitor**

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### **News: Sea Walls Café Proposal**

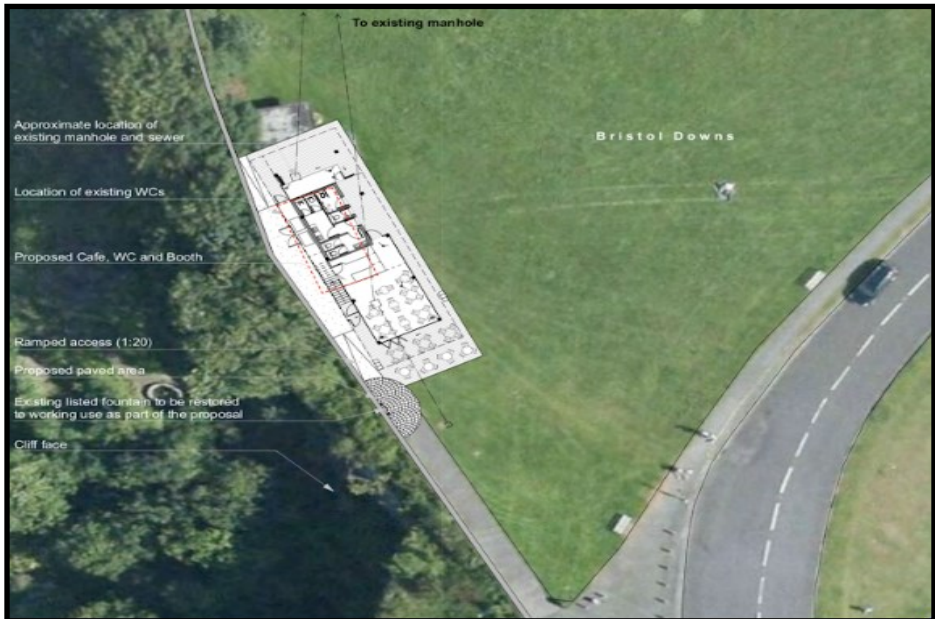
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The Downs Committee has submitted a revised proposal for the Sea Walls Café to Bristol City Council for approval. The main change is that the site has been moved to the current toilet block location. FOD+AG has supported the revised proposal but raised some reservations.



*Artist's Impression of the View from Circular Road*

## News: Sea Walls Café Proposal



### Location and Overall Layout



### Front, Rear and Side Elevations

# **We Want your Photographs!**

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Hello to all you budding photographers ... it's time to dig out your old Box Brownies, dust them off and help us gather some photographs of the Downs and Avon Gorge. (Actually I'm joking ... you would be lucky to find any film that would fit that camera!)

We are looking for photographs that illustrate life and the natural history of the Downs. I'm thinking of wildlife, wild flowers, trees, human activity, sunsets, landscapes etc or any other subject that you think might be interesting.

We need them for our magazine, website, Facebook, and WhatsApp page. The photographs will raise awareness of the beauty and also possibly the fragility of this wonderful green space. We are hoping to display the most interesting photographs in an exhibition towards the end of this year.

Please email photographs to [Lukeski@hotmail.com](mailto:Lukeski@hotmail.com)

- 1 Where possible please give a brief description of the subject.
2. It is the responsibility of each entrant to ensure that any images they submit have been taken with the consent of anyone who is identifiable, or the consent of their parent/guardian if they are under 16, and that they have been advised of the purpose of the submission.
3. We will credit any photographer, if we use their photograph on our social media sites.

**“Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better”, *Albert Einstein*.**

**Derek Catterall**

# **FOD+AG AGM Report**

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On a wet and windy evening last November over forty members assembled at the Redland Bowling Club for our Annual General Meeting.

Starting promptly at seven o'clock the Chair thanked members for their attendance and support, welcomed everyone and explained the format for the meeting.

The minutes of the 2017 meeting were accepted as a true and accurate record and duly signed off by the Chair.

The Treasurer introduced a paper and explained our current financial status and how we allocate funding for various projects.

The Chair addressed the meeting and gave a report on the previous year's activities. Details regarding our many events and recent undertakings were warmly received by attending members.

From the Chair a word of warning about the current financial predicament for all our parks and public open spaces, including the Downs.

The Chair spoke about the recent death of founder member and vice chair Richard Bland. Members were unanimous in acknowledging the significant contribution Richard had made over many years towards the preservation of the Downs.

The meeting was informed that Jack Penrose would be resigning from the FOD+AG Chair and would not be standing for re-election to the committee. FOD+AG members were asked to vote on a proposal presented by the Treasurer seeking approval for an addition to the constitution. The proposal would permit the creation of the non-executive role of Honorary President. The proposal was accepted by a majority vote.

As per our constitution the current members of the committee stood down. There were no additional nominations from members to stand for election to the committee. Eleven of the 2018 committee allowed their names to go forward for re-election for the coming year.

# **FOD+AG AGM Report**

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This was accepted by members and the following were confirmed as the FODAG committee for 2019.:

**Martin Collins, Derek Catterall, Joan Gubbin, Robert Westlake, Terry Hannan, Luke Hudson, Jaque Solomons, Bob Bell, Karen Findlay, Robin Haward, Caroline Baker.**

Following the meeting the committee appointed Robert Westlake as Chair, Bob Bell as Treasurer and Jaque Solomons as Secretary.

Before the break for refreshments the chair introduced a 'Mystery Item'. Following the memberships decision earlier to permit an addition to the constitution it was proposed that retiring chair Jack Penrose be offered the title of Honorary President. The offer was accepted and endorsed by the members. In recognition of Jack's contribution to the organisation fellow committee members presented him with an artwork of the Downs specially commissioned for the occasion.

The second half of the meeting started with the first guest speaker for the evening. Susan Sanctuary addressed members about a Parks Foundation, a new way forward for managing our parks and open spaces. Susan explained that the scheme was still in its infancy but outlined how the arrangement would work. The new system would be looking to involve volunteers in park related tasks.

The second speaker for the evening, Paul Wood delivered an interesting and well received talk about the New Hotwell in the Avon Gorge. Paul described in some detail the history of this little-known but fascinating part of the Gorge.

The chair brought the meeting to a close at 9.00pm, inviting members to stay awhile to meet, mingle and socialise.

The committee wishes to thank the Redland Bowling Club and members for hosting this year's AGM.

**Robert Westlake**

# Noticeboard

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## EVENTS :

**Conservation Sundays: Second Sunday in the month.**

**Next event is Sunday 17th February, 10:00am working on Clifton Camp**

Meet on grass junction of Observatory Road and Clifton Down Road. Vital to register so that refreshments and tools are correct.

Register with Joan Gubbin: [mail@gubbin.co.uk](mailto:mail@gubbin.co.uk)

**Deep Litter Clearance: Last Saturday in the month**

**Next event February 23rd and March 28th 10.00 - noon.**

Register with Martin Collins: [martinandglen@hotmail.com](mailto:martinandglen@hotmail.com)

**Granny Downs Tree Trail Walk: Saturday May 4th 10:30am, £5.00**

This is in a guided walk in memory of Richard Bland Register with Martin Collins: [martinandglen@hotmail.com](mailto:martinandglen@hotmail.com)

Register with Mandy Leivers: [mleivers@bristolzoo.org.uk](mailto:mleivers@bristolzoo.org.uk)

**Butterfly Monitoring and Goat Monitoring:** If you would like to get involved please email: [martinandglen@hotmail.com](mailto:martinandglen@hotmail.com).

**Dead Hedging and Alexanders Attack:** Working parties to help maintain the hedges and remove invasive weeds.

Register with Robin Haward: 01179,743385

or [robinhaward@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:robinhaward@blueyonder.co.uk)

**AGM:** The 2019 AGM will be held at Redland Green Bowls club on Wednesday 21st November at 7.00pm.

## COMMITTEE :

Robert Westlake (Chair), Martin Collins, Karen Findlay, Derek Catterall, Terry Hannan, Joan Gubbin, Robin Haward, Bob Bell, Caroline Baker & Luke Hudson.

## KEY CONTACTS:

Membership: Joan Gubbin

Articles for the Newsletter: Robin Haward / Luke Hudson

**Please Note: Deadline for submissions for the Spring edition is 20th April 2019.** Articles to [robinhaward@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:robinhaward@blueyonder.co.uk) or

[fodagcontent@gmail.com](mailto:fodagcontent@gmail.com)

**Subscriptions:** £10.00 per individual or £19.00 per household per calendar year. Join the group on the website, email ([mail@gubbin.co.uk](mailto:mail@gubbin.co.uk)) OR by post (FOD+AG ,c/o 3 Wallcroft, Durdham Park, BS6 6XJ)

## SOCIAL MEDIA:

**Website:** <http://fodag-bristol.weebly.com> The website has further information on events and a weekly blog on the Downs.

**Facebook:** Do please join the group on Facebook, and like/share the page to spread the word. [@FODAGbristol](https://www.facebook.com/FODAGbristol).

**Instagram:** [Friends\\_of\\_the\\_Downs](https://www.instagram.com/Friends_of_the_Downs).

Do please send any Downs & Gorge photos to [fodagbs@gmail.com](mailto:fodagbs@gmail.com).





*Common Beech in the Mist (Derek Catterall)*