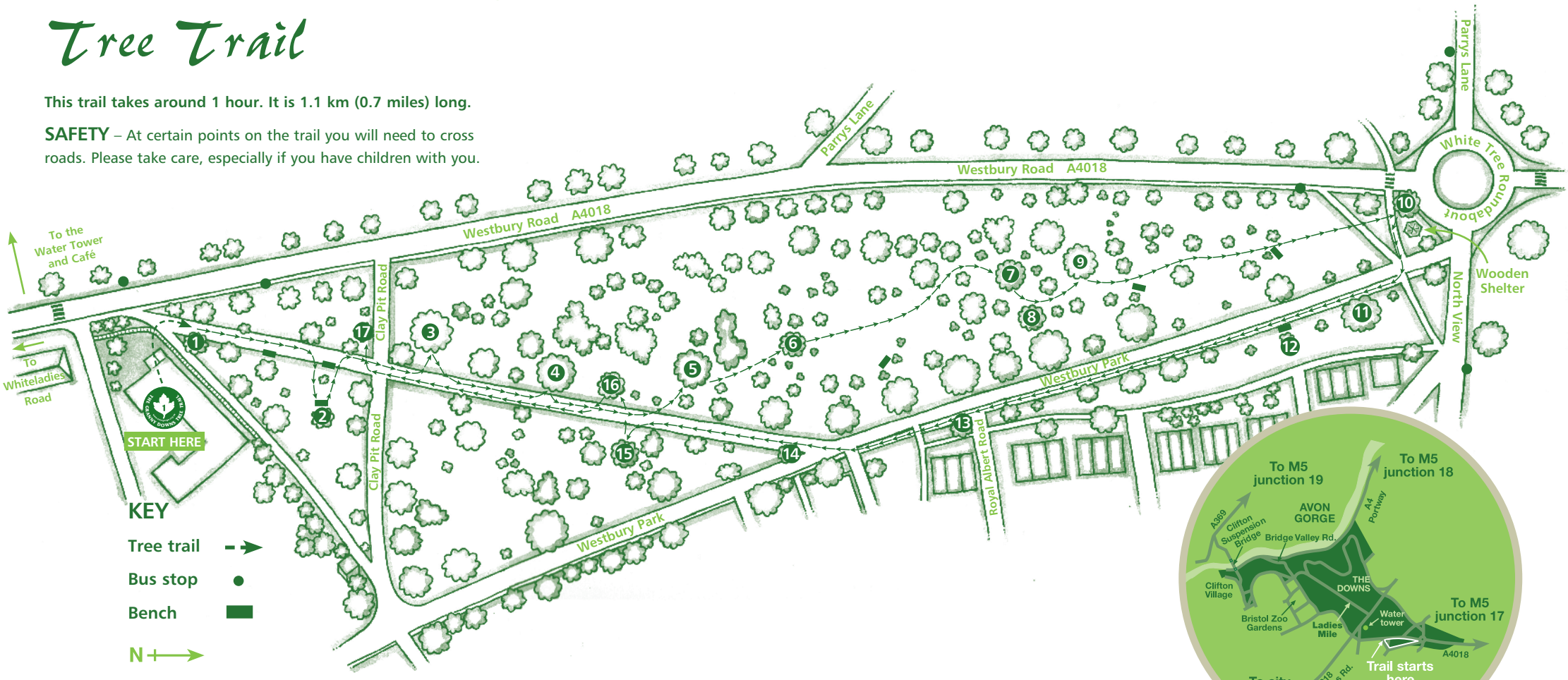
THE GRANNY DOWNS
Tree Trail

This trail takes around 1 hour. It is 1.1 km (0.7 miles) long.

SAFETY – At certain points on the trail you will need to cross roads. Please take care, especially if you have children with you.



Introduction and history

This trail covers a part of Durdham Down known as the Granny Downs. Legend has it that the residents of an old people's home bordering this area used to be brought here on sunny days to sit and enjoy the trees – hence the name 'Granny Downs'.

Clay Pit Road is named after the fact that this area was once worked for clay. This was used to line ornamental ponds (including the lake at Bristol Zoo Gardens) and to make bricks, chimney pots and large garden ornaments. After clay extraction ceased, the workings were filled in and trees began to be planted. They joined three pre-existing avenues of trees in this area: the oldest runs along Westbury Road (originally a turnpike road); there is another along Westbury Park, and the third cuts diagonally across the Granny Downs from Westbury Road to Westbury Park.

Some of the trees on this trail are native and others are from more exotic climes. We hope you enjoy discovering and learning about the terrific trees of the Granny Downs!

Visitors with wheelchairs and pushchairs

The beginning and end sections of the route are on tarmac paths but the middle section is on grass. As this area was once dug for clay, this section of the trail is gently undulating and bumpy in places. When it's been raining it can be soft and muddy.

The nearest toilets are at the toilet block beside the Water Tower. There are accessible toilets here.

How to get here

By bus: There are a number of services that have stops along the route of the trail.

By train: The nearest train station is **Clifton Down Station**.

For further information visit **www.traveline.info** or call Traveline on **0871 2002233**.

Follow the path back up to Clay Pit Road. After crossing the road carefully, turn right to the first of two young trees.

17 *Tulip tree*

Liriodendron tulipifera

Native to North America, this species was first established in Britain in the 1650s. As they grow tall and straight they're apparently the best trees to build a canoe from! These trees were planted in 2017 as replacements for horse chestnuts that had died.

Strange leaves that look as if the tops have been bitten off. When mature they produce unusual greenish-yellow tulip-shaped flowers.

We hope you enjoyed your walk! Visit again through the year to see how the trees change with the seasons.

16 *Red horse chestnut*

Aesculus x carnea

This tree is a hybrid between the horse chestnut (native to the Balkans) and the red buckeye (an American tree).

Leaves are smaller and darker than the horse chestnut. Lovely pinky-red flowers. The conker cases have few or no prickles.

Follow the path back up to Clay Pit Road. After crossing the road carefully, turn right to the first of two young trees.

15 *Wild cherry*

Prunus avium

The species name '*avium*' refers to birds who love to eat the small, bitter cherries. Blackbirds and song thrushes are particularly partial to them.

Papery white flowers appear April to May, before, or as the leaves emerge. Cherries in June. Leaves turn red in autumn.

Turn around. On the far side of the path you'll see the red chestnut; it has big, knobbly bumps (known as 'conkers') on its trunk and branches.

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Illustrations and map: Abi Stubbs. **Design:** Clare Challice www.inkwood.co.uk
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The Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge (FOD+AG)

are a multi-interest group of volunteers working to protect and enhance the Downs and Gorge for the benefit of all users. We do this through a range of activities such as regular winter litter picking, summer monitoring of butterflies and monitoring of the goats in the Gully. We also try to improve our knowledge of the area and pass on this understanding and appreciation through a series of articles, walks, talks and our quarterly newsletter.

www.friendsofthedowns.org www.facebook.com/avongorge

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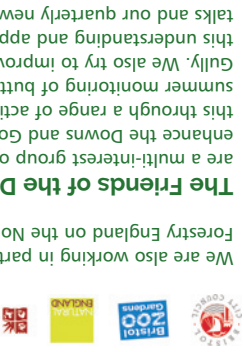
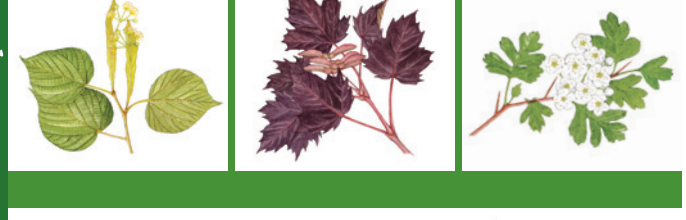
If you would like a copy of our **Discover the wildlife of the Avon Gorge & Downs leaflet,** copies of our other **nature trail leaflets,** details of our **school and playscheme sessions,** or our **events programme,** please contact:

Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project

The initial research for the Granny Downs Tree Trail was carried out by the late **Richard Bland**. He was a wonderful naturalist who observed and recorded the wildlife of the Downs for decades. He shared his knowledge by leading hundreds of guided walks and writing articles for various magazines. He was also Vice Chair of the Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge (FOD+AG). The trail has been completed in his memory by the Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project Education Team and Robin Haward from FOD+AG, with funding from the OVO Foundation and FOD+AG. *Thank you to Phil Burton and Tony Titchen for confirming the tree identification.*



Discover the fascinating trees that are planted here



THE GRANNY DOWNS
Tree Trail

THE GRANNY DOWNS TREE TRAIL 1

AVON GORGE & DOWNS WILDLIFE PROJECT

FOD + AG
Friends of the Downs
Avon Gorge

↓ Where to begin?

The map overleaf shows our suggested route around the Granny Downs. The trail is marked on the map with an arrowed line. Each tree on the trail has a numbered disc on it which corresponds to a number below and on the map.

We hope you enjoy your walk!

1 Common lime

Tilia x europaea

Limes are tall, long-lived trees so were a popular choice for planting in avenues such as this one which stretches over to the grand houses on Westbury Park. Common limes are a hybrid between small-leaved and large-leaved limes.

Flimsy, heart-shaped leaves; smooth apart from tufts of white or buff-coloured hairs where the veins meet on the undersides (compare this to the large-leaved lime later in the trail). Sweet-smelling pale yellow flowers hang down in clusters in midsummer.

Walk down the footpath for 60m. At the second bench turn right and cross the grass to tree 2 which has a bench directly in front of it.

2 Hawthorn 'Paul's Scarlet'

Crataegus laevigata 'Paul's Scarlet'

Hawthorns normally produce flowers with a single row of white petals. This type of Midland hawthorn was bred to have dark pink double flowers.

Frothy dark pink flowers in spring; red berries in autumn.

Walk back to the path and turn right. Cross over Clay Pit Road. Immediately after crossing, tree 3 is set back 15m from the path, on your left.

3 Purple beech

Fagus sylvatica f. *purpurea*

This purple-leaved form of the common beech is a naturally occurring genetic variant which was first recorded in Germany in the 15th century.

Leaves appear in April; hairy and pinkish-red to start with, turning darker in time. In autumn, beech nuts are eagerly gobbled up by birds, mice and squirrels.

Go back to the path and turn left. Continue until you reach the third tree on your left; it has a massive trunk so you shouldn't miss it!

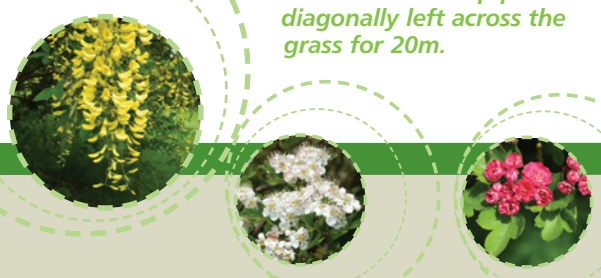
4 Large-leaved lime

Tilia platyphyllos

This impressive tree is over 200 years old. In the wild, large-leaved limes are rare but they are found in nearby Leigh Woods. The stringy inner bark, known as 'bast', was once used to make ropes for ships.

Heart-shaped leaves with pointed tips, hairy on both sides (unlike the common lime). In June, the strongly-scented drooping flowers are particularly attractive to bees. They form large, hairy, spherical seeds.

Continue along the path. At the second lamp post head diagonally left across the grass for 20m.



5 Silver maple

Acer saccharinum

Native Americans had many uses for this eastern North American tree, including making syrup from the sap and medicines from the bark.

Leaves are pale green on top and silvery white beneath, turning yellow in autumn.

Stay on the grass and walk down between the bushes. Ahead of you, you'll see a tree with branches that sweep upwards.

6 Common hawthorn

Crataegus monogyna

Hawthorn trees are a traditional part of the Downs' landscape. They're great for wildlife, providing food for over 150 insect species, and the berries (haws) are devoured by birds in the autumn.

Creamy white flowers appear in May; red berries in autumn. Leaves are glossy, bright green.

Walk ahead across the grass for 100m in the direction of the White Tree Roundabout.

7 Common ash

Fraxinus excelsior

In pre-Christian times the ash was considered to be a sacred tree by the Scandinavians. It was believed that Odin carved the first man out of a piece of ash.

Black buds. Leaves come out later than most other trees. Bunches of winged fruits, or 'keys', in late summer and autumn.

15m to the right of the ash is a multi-stemmed tree.

8 Laburnum

Laburnum anagyroides hybrid

Laburnums are one of the most poisonous trees growing on the Downs but they are also one of the most beautiful. Yellow flowers cascade down from these trees in spring earning them the nickname 'golden rain'.

Each leaf is made up of three leaflets. Long chains of golden-yellow flowers. Brown pods containing poisonous seeds stay on the tree through winter.

Continue on down between the trees and patches of scrub towards the White Tree Roundabout. A twin-stemmed oak tree is on your left.

9 English or pedunculate oak

Quercus robur

The second part of this species' scientific name, '*robur*', means sturdy, and until iron tools were developed people were unable to cut these trees down. Oaks support more species of wildlife than any of our other native trees.

Leaves deeply lobed with 'ears' at the base and almost no stem. Acorns on a stalk or peduncle (on sessile oak, our other native oak, acorns have no stalk).

Head towards the White Tree Roundabout. To the left of the wooden shelter is tree 10.

10 Purple Norway maple

Acer platanoides

Norway maples were first introduced into Britain in 1683. Hardy and tolerant of pollution, this purple-leaved variant seems to be growing well beside the roundabout.

Clusters of pale yellow flowers appear in early spring before the leaves. Winged seeds or 'helicopters' in the autumn.

Directly opposite this tree, on the other side of the roundabout, is the famous 'White Tree'. The original tree was an ash planted in the mid 1800s. Its trunk was painted white to act as a marker indicating where visitors to Cote House should turn off Westbury Road. When the roundabout was built in 1950, it was replaced with an elm. This died of Dutch elm disease in 1973 and the current tree, a lime, was planted in its place in 1974.

Turn right and follow the path, keeping the wooden shelter on your left. Taking care to avoid the traffic coming from your right, cross Westbury Park and turn right.

11 Horse chestnut

Aesculus hippocastanum

Why 'horse chestnut'? When the leaves fall, they leave behind a horseshoe-shaped scar on the twig. They were also fed to horses to relieve coughs and to make their coats shine. Conkers contain saponins, chemicals which can be used to make a form of soap.

Sticky buds open in spring producing large five to seven-fingered leaflets on a stiff green stem. From April to mid-May look out for the upright white flower spikes known as 'candles'. In September look for the chestnuts or 'conkers'.

Horse chestnuts were planted along Westbury Park around 1860 to create a fine avenue. Sadly, many of the old trees have died. Indian horse chestnuts were chosen as replacements as they aren't affected by the diseases that kill horse chestnuts. Immediately to the right of this horse chestnut are three newly planted trees.

12 Indian horse chestnut

Aesculus indica

This species comes from the Himalayas and reached Britain in 1851.

Unfolding leaves are orange before becoming green. Narrower than horse chestnut, each leaflet is stalked. Flowers appear later, in June. Conker cases are smooth and leathery.

Walk along the pavement keeping the chestnuts on your left. As you cross Royal Albert Road look out for a small tree on your left.

13 Hornbeam

Carpinus betulus

Although the leaves of this species closely resemble beech leaves, they are more ribbed and are edged with double teeth. Hornbeams also come into leaf much earlier.

Continue along the pavement until you can see a footpath cutting back diagonally across the Granny Downs to your right. Immediately after crossing Westbury Park you'll see tree 14 on your left.

14 Silver birch

Betula pendula

Silver birches are fantastic for wildlife, providing food and shelter for more than 300 different insect species. Greenfinches and goldfinches also eat the tiny, winged seeds.

Notice the silvery white bark and delicate drooping branches.

Continue on the path. After the third lamp post and the clump of scrub, turn left onto the grass to visit tree 15.