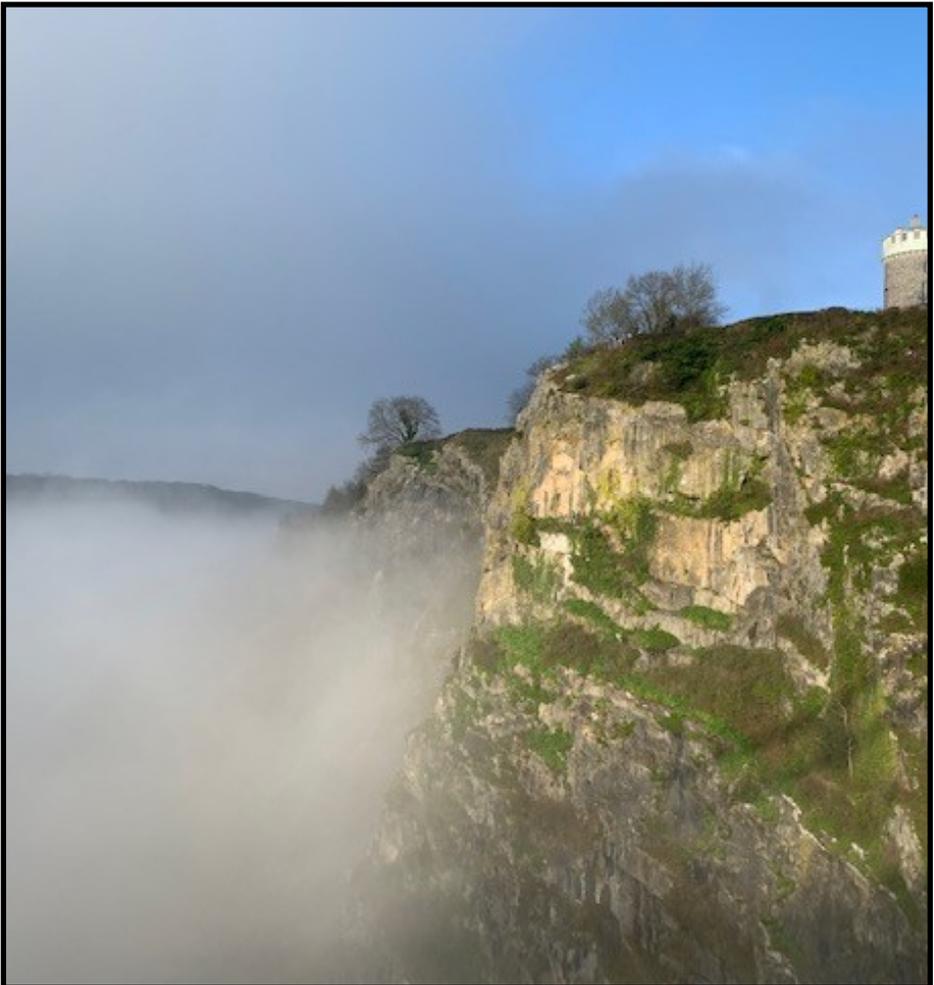


FOD ⁺ Avon Gorge AG

Friends of the Downs

Issue 35

Winter 2020



Chairman's Report January 2020

2019 has been and gone and we look forward to a fresh New Year with optimism, tempered with some concern. Concern for all our parks and open spaces in what is still an uncertain future. Principally, how our parks will be funded and how to avoid further decline. As previously reported the Downs will no longer receive any funding from the City Council but from now on will be required to be self-financing with all that that entails.

For us as an organisation 2020 will present fresh challenges and to aid us in our endeavours your committee has devised an Action Plan to assist us in prioritising and focusing on those challenges. We have identified over twenty key issues that we would like to address in the short and longer term and we are in the process of refining that list which we will share with you as soon as we have completed the process. The Action Plan is designed to be flexible and reflect real time situations as and when they occur.

Last November members gathered at Redland Bowling Club for our AGM. As dictated by our constitution the whole committee stood down. All those who stood down were prepared to stand for another year and were re-elected unopposed by the membership.

The current FODAG committee members are - Robert Westlake, {Chair} Robin Haward, {Vice Chair} Jac Solomons, {Secretary}, Bob Bell {Treasurer} Joan Gubbin {Memership Secretary}, Martin Collins, Terry Hannan, Derek Catterall, Tim Clarke, Caroline Baker, Luke Hudson and Pat Goddard (Archivist).

Website and social media: Kay Snowdon, Stephanie Wooster

The committee reported that in the past year FODAG had contributed over two thousand hours of volunteer hours to the betterment of the Downs and Gorge. Members heard about the many projects completed and plans for the future. Members listened to many practical achievements including scrub clearance, removing noxious weeds, repairs to the dead hedges, managing the wild flower meadows, refurbishing Downs structures and deep litter clearance projects. This is in addition to assisting with managing the goats, monitoring butterflies and working with the University Geography department on prestigious projects. We have worked closely in support of the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project and the Your Downs group to reach out to

Chairman's Report January 2020

a diverse range of people from across the City.

Throughout 2019 we arranged or supported many walks, talks and opportunities to meet socially plus our celebration of Downs photography, the new Granny Downs Tree Trail and the hugely popular Downs Star Party.

This coming year as well as all our regular activities we have numerous ambitious plans. We are intending to reinstate the fallow flower beds at the Blackboy Hill triangle, introduce new pamphlets and welcome pack, install a further tree trail, support the recently formed Parks Foundation and support for the Parks Forum. We want to confirm relationships with like-minded volunteer groups, increase our membership, and engage with the student population. We will be investigating the possibility of sponsorship or patronage from local companies.

So dear members you can see there is much going on and much planned for the coming year and your committee pays tribute to all of you have turned out to support those activities in 2019. Your contribution is vital to the preservation of the Gorge and Downs. But and there is always a but, we could do more and it's not all about heavy physical activity, we also need volunteers to help with delivering this Newsletter, marketing, IT skills and help managing our social media platforms. If you feel you could make a small contribution please let us know via our website. The Gorge & Downs need YOU. There is always something you can do.

At the AGM I took the opportunity to thank a few of the organisations and individuals who have and continue to support us, so a big thank you to Café Retreat, AXA Insurance, Redland & Cotham Amenity Society, Ben Skuse and the Downs operational team, the Downs committee, Mandy Leivers & the Zoo.

A Happy and Prosperous New Year to you all.

Robert Westlake, Chair

Statement from Respect the Downs -

The ever-increasing numbers of semi-permanent van dwellers and traveller incursions on Clifton and Durdham Downs – and the apparently laissez faire attitude taken by the Mayor and Bristol City Council towards their removal – has impacted huge numbers of local residents and users of the Downs.

Inconsistent or non-enforcement of by-laws and council policies has directly contributed to the issue – to the extent that the Downs now features as a free place to stay on Camper Van websites (for example. A group of fed-up residents has lost patience with the lack of a robust response from the council and formed the ‘Respect The Downs’ group (www.respectthedowns.co.uk).

The group’s objectives are:

Van Dwellers

- Extension and strict enforcement of the 5-hour restricted parking limit to all roads around the Downs and extension of the no-return time period.
- Introduction of a blanket “No overnight sleeping” Traffic Restriction Order that covers all roads on and around the Downs.
- Vigorous and consistent application of the Council’s Van Dweller Policy to all parts of the Downs.
- Provision of a pay-as-you-use managed site for Van Dwellers to use when they visit Bristol.

Travellers

- Modification of the Council Traveller Management Policy to re-balance residents’ rights with those of travellers.
- Provision of full transparency and accountability regarding their current traveller removal process, including the involvement of affected residents from the point of Impact Assessment through removal.
- Streamlined, fast-track legal process to enable fast-track removal of traveller encampments from The Downs.

Respect The Downs will provide a much-needed ‘hub’ for up-to-date

Are the Downs Becoming a Campsite?

information via a blog about what is being done to expedite removal of any traveller camps and van dwellers that appear on the Downs. Additionally, it will act as a focal point for documenting and sharing any incidents of anti-social behaviour, harassment, intimidation etc that may occur

The group has already engaged with Council Officers, the Police and other organisations associated with the Downs and will use these links to ensure that all responsible parties are held to account.

A spokesman for the group said 'during the last few years, residents and users of the Downs have witnessed numerous incidents of anti-social, intimidating and in some cases outright dangerous behaviour from traveller encampments. These include littering, fly-tipping, defecating, emptying buckets of raw sewage into hedges and bushes and driving cars at speed on the Downs.

We do understand that different people want to live different lifestyles, however if that lifestyle choice then rides roughshod over Conservation Areas and the decency of the streets of the City, then the Council should not ignore the issue and leave it at the doorsteps of weary, council-tax paying residents, but should render camping on the Downs and surrounding streets illegal and provide a pay-as-you-use alternative in recognition of their responsibilities'....

More information and a means to register your support can be found at the group's website www.RespectTheDowns.co.uk

Statement: The above content is the express view of The Respect The Downs Group. The Friends of the Downs & Avon Gorge have met with representatives of Respect the Downs to discuss shared concerns. As an organisation FODAG acknowledges the rights of the travelling community and those who choose an alternative lifestyle. We have sympathy with local residents and all legitimate users of the Downs and continue to support the Downs Committee and the City Council to bring about an acceptable resolution.

News From the Downs: The Stone Bridge

The proposal for a stone bridge to span Bridge Valley Road has been rejected by a Planning Inspector appointed by the Environment Secretary. Any structure on Common land must be approved by the Secretary of State. {The Commons Act 2016} FODAG are currently considering the Inspectors comments before deciding on any further action.

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 cover.

Photographs

We are always very grateful to receive photographs of the Downs and Avon gorge from our members. We will use them for publication in our magazine, website and Facebook pages.

- Where possible please give a brief description of the subject.
- It is the responsibility of the photographer to ensure that any images they send to us 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.
- We will try to credit any photographer if we use their photograph.
- all rights to any photographs sent to us will pass to the Friends of the Downs and Avon gorge unless stated otherwise.

Please send photographs to fodagcontent@gmail.com

News from the Downs: Bee Happy

A new bee shelter has been erected underneath the Water Tower, opposite Stoke Road. Hopefully this summer we will see the benefits as the inhabitants emerge to forage on the gardens and wildflowers of the Downs.



Part of the Bee Shelter by the Water Tower

December Star Party

On a distinctly chilly evening early in December around sixty hardy souls turned up at the Seawalls for the Downs annual Star Party. The forecast for clear skies was good but early indications did not bode well with high cirrus cloud obscuring the heavens and a winter halo around a spectacular half-moon. Undaunted organisers and volunteers continued with setting up the event and hoped for an improvement and as the temperature dropped and as if to order gaps in the cloud began to appear, finally clearing to provide an astral bonanza for our guests who were treated to seasonal singing, fascinating storytelling about the constellations, hot drinks and specially created star-shaped cookies. Experts from the Bristol Astronomical Society and Explorer Dome were on hand to explain the mysteries of the Universe and guests had an opportunity to view the stars and moon close up through a range of sophisticated equipment. FODAG along with the Downs and Avon Gorge Wildlife Project were delighted to co-host this celebration of all things celestial and a big shout out to all the volunteers who helped make this such a delightful event.

Robert Westlake



Are the Downs Haunted?

Nola Hersey spotted this bizarre visage while rambling across Clifton Down. She was so taken by the sight that she snapped a shot on her phone.



Nola said: 'We had been out for a walk and it was a lovely sunset so I stopped to take a few pictures. 'Then I noticed a girl's face very clearly in the cloud. It was amazing, you could see her hair and face very well. 'It almost looked like she was wearing one of those Victorian wigs, it was very spooky. If you look closely you can also see a hair band around her head.

Robert Westlake

Source Mail Online 2010

Leisure Loop Update

A new 2.3-mile 'leisure loop' for cyclists looks set to be created around the western area of the Downs. The new path along Rockleaze and Downleaze would lead to a proposed new cafe at Seawalls

Cyclists and pedestrians will also no longer have to dodge each other on the pavement beside Durdham Down, under plans given the nod by the common's owners on January 20.

The Downs Committee gave their blessing for cyclists to take over the tarmac footpath which runs alongside the A4018 between the top of Black-boy Hill and Badminton College.

Pedestrians - including runners, wheelchair users and people strolling with prams - will get their own specially-constructed path a few metres away on Durdham Down itself.

The plans, which still require planning approval, are part of a wider scheme to reduce traffic on the A4018 and improve cycling and walking facilities on the Downs.

To begin with, signage will be the only indication that the pavement has become a cycle way, but the route will be properly segregated once funding becomes available.

Bristol is in the eye of a perfect storm of a transport crisis - and we all need to take responsibility for fixing it

The path on Durdham Down will be at least 2m wide and made of material yet to be specified.

Monday's decision by the Downs Committee, which represents Bristol City Council and the Society of Merchant Venturers, follows the rejection of an earlier proposal for two shared-use paths side-by-side: one on the pavement and one on the common.

The acceptance of the revised plan means council officers can now finalise the proposal and submit a planning application.

Stoke Bishop councillor and Downs Committee member Peter Abraham told the meeting: "I see this as a vast improvement on the previous plan."

Leisure Loop Update

The new 'leisure loop'

A leisure loop for pedestrians and cyclists at the Seawalls end of the Downs is in the planning stages.

The committee also gave their support to plans for a 2.3-mile "leisure loop" of new 3m-wide, shared-use paths for walkers, runners and cyclists around the western area of the Downs.

The proposed loop would follow Rockleaze and Downleaze, Circular Road, Ladies Mile and a short part of Stoke Road.

Circular Road could become one way or get traffic calming measures to enforce the 20mph speed limit under the plans.

The new path along Rockleaze and Downleaze would lead to a proposed new cafe at Seawalls if the controversial steel and glass structure is eventually built. A government planning inspector has denied permission for its construction but the Downs Committee is free to resubmit its application.

The leisure loop proposal was developed by Cycle Sunday working with the local charity Greenways and Cyclerroutes.

It is part of a larger and more complex plan for improving cycling and walking on the Downs which dates from 2015.

Following the committee's approval, Cycle Sunday plans to work with a subgroup of the committee to finalise details of the leisure loop before a planning application is submitted.

Extract: Bristol Live.

The Mystery of the Blue Gull

It's time to tell this story, even if the world is still not prepared for it.

This is what happened

4th February 2011: 7.30 am. Avon Gorge, Bristol Downs. Red sunrise, hard frost. I am here to feed the crows. Here they are, and now like milk boiling over, here come the gulls from the Gorge to join them, and one of them is bright blue.

Is it a gull? Yes. I can tell a gull from a parrot.

Is it a trick of the light? No, the other gulls are white, blushed pink by the rising sun.

How are other gulls reacting to it? Normally. Two are flying alongside.

Is anyone else seeing this? No, it's cold, early and deserted.

Did I photograph it? No, I am not of the generation that carries mobile phones everywhere.

Will anyone believe me? No.

Do I keep quiet to avoid derision? No.

Do I need to know what this is about? Absolutely.

But it's beauty of Narnian proportions; the luminous aqua bird in the pink light, glowing against the dark branches of the trees.

Oh how I've paid for that once-in-a lifetime image.

What happened next

Birders laughed at me, though one kindly says he saw a red seagull where it had come into contact with a boat being painted.

I *know* what I saw. So, like the children in the wardrobe, I entered another world. Mine, alas, was not a snowy forest, but onstage in the Theatre of the Absurd with a gaudy cast of painted birds, golden swans, and a guest appearance by the European Co-ordinator of Gulls.

The latter assured me that no gull colouring had been done on his watch for the last ten years, he would *know*; therefore the bird must have rubbed itself

The Mystery of the Blue Gull

on to some paint. And he consoled me that there wasn't a more interesting story ...

Well, I'm hardly going to let it go at that. And so I dug deeper ...

But I wish I hadn't shone a light into this tawdry world. I wish I didn't know that in the US, there's a man who paints pigeons red white and blue for displays, only they can't fly in the rain. I wish I didn't know that you can inject coloured dye into the eggs of a duck and get multi coloured ducklings. (*why? why?*) I wish I didn't know that the Audubon society was up to its beak in this. I wish I hadn't heard of gold swans (pictured in reputable research journal) let alone powder blue swans from Siberia.

I wish I wasn't haunted by the elderly birdwatcher in the US branded a liar for his account of a bright blue gull, and yet he frequents the sighting area with a picture of the blue gull in hand asking, *did anyone else see this gull?*

But now ...

A more interesting story emerges, even though I have only just discovered it as life required me to take my eye off the ball for a while.

In November 2016 wildlife enthusiast David Lynch discovered a dead blue gull in Inverness. You can see this gull by googling *blue gull David Lynch* and reading the newspaper reports and photograph. The RSPCA says it is a common gull dyed blue, but they are not aware of any bird identification schemes that involve dyeing. It is exactly the same luminous turquoise as the gull I saw. They say it is a mystery.

I mean, a common gull lives on average for 10 years. Was it my Bristol Downs gull? No, even I don't believe that.

I would be so grateful for any insight or theories.

Geraldine@geraldinetaylor.co.uk

History of the Downs: The Hotwell Spring

For a relatively short period in history the Hotwell Spring attracted the great and good from far and wide. It had become a fashionable summer resort to take the health-giving waters of the Avon Gorge. It was believed that the water had medicinal properties and many flocked to treat various maladies and more chronic illnesses. Others came to partake in the emerging social scene, some just to relax and enjoy the spectacular scenery afforded by the Downs and Gorge.

Visits from the landed gentry and famous faces like Daniel Defoe and Joseph Haydn helped raise the status of the spa. As the resort became more popular Hotwells and eventually Clifton expanded to accommodate the requirements of its wealthy patrons, their retinues and physicians.

An important part of the spa experience was the Downs and Gorge. Visitors could promenade through Clifton, tour the Downs and marvel at the natural splendour of the Gorge with its distant views of the Severn and the Welsh hills beyond. Boat trips along the Avon with musical accompaniment proved extremely popular as well as many Downs sporting events such as horse racing, wrestling, cricket and cock fighting.

The Hotwell water welled up ready-heated, warm rather than hot and was reported as having a pleasant milky taste to the palate. Its restorative properties however need to be considered in the context of the limited medical knowledge of the time. There were no antibiotics and many quacks operated around the spa. The claims of the curative capacity of the water were decidedly ambitious including claims to cure consumption. {TB} In 1754 the founder of Methodism John Wesley contracted a “galloping consumption” and tried the waters of Hotwells as a remedy. The liquor seemed to have favoured Wesley and he made a remarkable recovery living a further thirty-seven years finally expiring aged 87.

The Hotwells site was not easily accessible, there was no easy approach to the spring by land as it was cut off by the sheer face of St. Vincent’s Rocks. A way down from Clifton was cut to facilitate access. Still far from easy, as adherents to the spring were required to negotiate a steep and rocky trail and navigate two hundred slippery steps. Finally, in 1662 a carriageway was cut out of the rock alongside the riverbank and in 1829 the route down from

History of the Downs: The Hotwell Spring

Clifton was significantly improved with the construction of the Zig-Zag walk.

It was the Society of Merchant Venturers that recognised the potential of the spa and as land-owners of large parts of Clifton saw a business opportunity and in 1696 leased the well for development. The spring was enclosed and its water pumped up into a new Hotwell House, which included a pump room and lodgings. This then was the spa at the beginning of the Georgian era.

Despite many claims of the healing powers of the waters not all were so fortunate. Some even died as a result of the treatment, possibly consuming water that had been contaminated from the polluted Avon.

Belief in the healing powers of the waters finally began to wane and visitors were further deterred by ever increasing charges as the developers tried to sustain their ailing business and halt the decline. The New Pump Rooms were eventually demolished in 1876.

Robert Westlake



Hotwell House

Granny Downs: Autumn into Winter

Forgive me, I must tell you this first and it is loosely related. On the 19th September, a friend and I were walking down a small alleyway on the way to North View. I said, *'that drone is very low overhead', and we looked up and there were 18 Brent geese in Red Arrows formation above us, honking away, en route for the Granny Downs - magnificent!*

And the week after, literally hundreds of goldfinches overhead, followed by a jay.

Conker festival, jays, squirrels What a year for them - squirrels with conkers in mouths racing with their unbearable lightness of being ...

Silver birches, some yellow and more of them later because autumn's not over till the silver birches are gold.

Robins showing themselves more – they went through a strange phase of hiding under cars and in bushes. They wouldn't tell me why ...

The late September light Oh the light ...

October now and the sound of the wind in the trees, the rush and roar. Thomas Hardy writes of woodlanders who could tell the tree they walked under in the dark by the sound of the wind in the leaves.

Mid October and the silver birches are up to their ankles in water. When the sun does come out, I can see the horse chestnut leaves are toasty brown.

Jays abound although unusually quietly.

Late October and the pied wagtails are back- one beside a muddy puddle near the road. Where have they been?

One moment: 16th November 8.00 am. The light! And magpies make autumn look more beautiful. Raven love song, the most beautiful sound in the world to me. It's a tiny snatch of notes used to woo each other, and to soothe their young in the nest. Once heard, always longed for.

Silver birches up to their ankles in water again ... but so beautiful, silver trunks and branches and a filigree of gold leaves swaying in the slightest wind.

December 1st: cold and damp, piles of orange leaves everywhere and

Granny Downs: Autumn in to Winter

maggies turning them over in the way that blackbirds do.

December 3rd: Sticky buds shining in the sun and a brown beaked blackbird: a juvenile male.

December 6th: Crows and ravens surfing the high winds as surfers ride the ocean.

December 15th: a gull swimming in the dew pond.

December 20th: Robins' song has a certain sharpness to it., they sing defying the rain and the high wind.

No redwings yet. Will it really begin to get light again from tomorrow?

Geraldine Taylor

Downs History: The Downs Commoners

Later this year the Downs Commoners will exercise their right to graze sheep on the Downs. This is an ancient property right that pre-dates the Downs Act {1861}. Records show several thousand sheep roaming across the Downs from the 1600s.

Those entitled to graze their livestock formed themselves into an organised group known as the Downs Commoners and employed a shepherd to manage the animals. The Downs at this time would have looked much different than they do today, the grass was not mown, the action of the sheep kept the Downs open and free of scrub and vegetation. This continued up until around 1926 when a disastrous outbreak of sheep scab decimated the flocks and a decision was made to discontinue using the Downs for grazing.



At this stage the Commoners decided to continue to retain the right to graze and that right has been in place for nearly one hundred years and to ensure that this privilege is preserved the Commoners are required to reassert that right every five years.

This tradition, now largely symbolic comprises bringing to the Downs half a dozen or so animals, usually supplied by the University where they are joined by representatives of the Commoners and local primary school pupils. The animals for obvious reasons now have to remain penned but seem to enjoy the change of scenery

This year the Commoners have invited FODAG to join them to celebrate this quaint and typically English ritual and we were pleased to accept and firmly support traditions and customs that make the Downs such a special place.

Sheep will be grazing near St Monica's on Tuesday 12th May 10am-3pm

Geology of the Downs: Bristol Diamonds

We all know that the Avon Gorge is famous for its bridge, its rare plants and the Bristol Whitebeam but did you know that the Gorge was previously famous for its 'diamonds'. They were once popular keepsakes with visitors to the area, particularly those visiting the Hotwells Spa. Bristol Diamonds were in fact not true diamonds but Quartz crystals from geological rock formations or geodes from the Triassic period. The sparkling stones were often worked locally into pieces of jewellery. Excessive collecting and quarrying over the years have made the stones rare but they do occasionally appear. Some striking examples can be seen displayed at Bristol Museum and some fine stones are kept by Bristol University Geological Department. The stones eventually fell out of favour even for cheap costume jewellery and became synonymous with something bright and sparkly but essentially worthless.

In 1654, diarist John Evelyn visited Bristol and, like many other visitors, went hunting for the diamonds, "what was most stupendous to me was the rock of St. Vincent, the precipice whereof is equal to anything of that nature I have seen in the most confragous cataracts of the Alps. Here we went searching for Bristol diamonds and to the Hotwells at its foot.

They were further described by Chilcott, in 'Chilcott's New Guide to Bristol, Clifton and the Hotwells' (1826) *as sometimes "exceedingly clear and brilliant, and of so hard a nature as to cut glass ... sometimes tinged with yellow, sometimes purple".*

Sample Bristol Diamonds were exhibited as part of the geology of Bristol section at London's Great Exhibition, in 1851.

You can still see fine specimens of Bristol Diamonds at the Central Hall of Goldney Grotto, Clifton, which contain columns covered with the crystals.

So next time you go for a scramble in the Gorge keep a watchful eye for anything that sparkles, it might just be a Bristol Diamond.

Source material - Wikipedia

Nordic Walking: Your New Favourite Sport

If you've walked on the Downs recently you may have seen people striding out with what look like ski poles. No, they're not lost on their way to the slopes – they are in fact Nordic walking. This fitness activity has been growing in popularity since it arrived in the UK in 2004, and for good reason. It is a powerful whole body exercise which activates your core stabilising muscles, energises your back and strengthens your heart and lungs.

One of the most popular places to Nordic walk in Bristol is on the Downs and with good reason. It's easy to get to, wonderfully varied, good underfoot, and with stunning views to entice you along.

What is Nordic Walking?

Nordic walking is based entirely on your natural walking pattern but uses two specially designed poles angled backwards to help build your upper body strength and accelerate you forwards.



Nordic Walking: Your New Favourite Sport

The poles are a clever fitness tool which takes walking to the next level. They have a glove-type strap which clips in to a slender, ergonomic handle. You push through the strap which allows you to swing your arm more fully, giving you greater power and using your whole body. Nordic walking poles are very distinct from a trekking pole, which is generally heavier, with a chunkier grip and a loop strap.

What are the Benefits ?

Core strength. Nordic walking is like Pilates in motion. Every time you push the pole into the ground you switch on your deep core stabilising muscles and strengthen them. These important muscles help with your balance. They also support your back.

Back health. A key part of the Nordic walking technique is the gentle rotation of your spine. This helps strengthen the muscles supporting your spine and boosts back health generally.

Improved posture. How to walk with good posture is the foundation of the Nordic walking technique. You will learn how to lengthen your spine; maintain the correct head position; lift your chest; distribute your weight evenly; and use your feet properly. Plus you can apply these skills to your regular walking.

Heart health. Nordic walking is a full body exercise and uses almost all the body's skeletal muscles. It's a bit like using the cross-trainer in the gym except that you're outside and it's much more sociable. By involving the upper body muscles your heart and lungs have to work harder even on the flat. The benefits of exercise for your heart and lungs are well documented. Amongst other things it helps lower blood pressure, reduces your risk of heart disease and type 2 diabetes and keeps your arteries clear.

Strong bones. Public Health England specifically recommends Nordic walking as a muscle and bone strengthening and balancing activity. Its weightbearing nature and the added resistance provided by the poles helps improve bone health and strength.

Nordic Walking: Your New Favourite Sport

Mental health. Exercise helps reduce stress and anxiety. An exercise like Nordic walking which is outside in green surroundings is even more beneficial for mental health and wellbeing. The Downs is a perfect green environment to get out, get active and boost your physical and mental health.

Fun! There are many things in life that you have to do because you are told to or ought to. Exercise should not be one of them. Nordic walking is fun. You're in the fresh air; it's sociable; you get to know your local area better and can visit new places; it's non-competitive and you can be good at it even (especially) if you're not the 'sporty' type.

Do I need Specialist Kit?

Other than the poles themselves, no specialist kit is required to Nordic walk. However it's worth investing in some well-fitting walking shoes or boots with a flexible sole. *A good, breathable waterproof jacket is also valuable, especially in Bristol.*

How do I get Started?

You need to learn the correct technique from a qualified Nordic walking instructor. A good starting point is to speak to our team at Bristol Nordic Walking. We run over 30 fitness classes a week in Bristol including 14 on the Downs itself. Most of our classes are one hour long and in that time you can expect a warm up, Nordic walking technique coaching, stretches at the end, and a satisfying walk in the middle.

Our Downs walks are mixed ability classes – we are an inclusive club and our mission is to show everyone that getting active and getting fit is possible **and** fun. To that end we have a slower 40 minute walk on Tuesdays if you are just starting out on your fitness journey and are anxious that you might not be able to walk for an hour. Plus we run twice weekly dedicated Parkinson's classes. Our classes cost from between £5.75 and £9, depending on whether you join our membership or pay as you go. Our slower 40 min walk is £5. For more information and to book a beginner workshop visit www.bristolnordicwalking.co.uk, email info@bristolnordicwalking.co.uk, or call us on 07886 885213.

Zoo Downs Parking— A Member's Response

In response to the article Downs for People A Statement to Downs committee re Bristol Zoo Parking Autumn 2019

I write as a local who has lived in Bristol and enjoyed our local Zoological Gardens since the 1970s. I would like to make some comparisons with other activities on the Downs.

Firstly I quote from Justin Morris, Chief Executive of the Bristol Zoo Gardens.

'Bristol Zoo Gardens is one of the most popular visitor attractions in Bristol and a great asset to the city and region. It is unavoidable that there will always be very popular days of the year when people want to visit the Zoo. The temporary use of the land off Ladies Mile provides a low impact solution with minimal disruption.

No one more than Bristol Zoological Society, with its dedicated team of native species conservationists and the Avon Gorge & Downs Project takes more seriously the recreational and ecological value of the Downs.

Bristol Zoological Society is a conservation charity and for many years has been encouraging visitors to its zoos to travel sustainably and is clearly committed to working to continue this.'

There are numerous activities impacting on the grassy sward of the Downs, and none occur on the areas of rare Downland plants.

Interestingly Grass is amazingly resilient to trampling, burning, flooding, freezing, and grazing. And with a little reseeding, year after year the Downs turns green again, whatever activity has been enjoyed by the visitors.

Zoo parking has minimal detrimental effect compared with the impaction of the soil by marquees, juggernauts, joy-rides and parking for Funderworld, Festivals, or the noise pollution of pop concerts, the air pollution of visiting cars. We must remember that these activities bring a revenue to the Downs Committee to maintain the Downs. Non paying visitors park illegally, leave tons of litter and burn patches bare with BBQ's, cycling and joggers trample permanent new tracks. I would be in favour of looking critically at all users of the Downs so that we can reduce the negative impacts of all, before singling out the Zoo.

Caroline Baker

Zoo Downs Parking— FODAG’s Position

Our official position is that: We would support an eventual end to the practice of Zoo parking on the Downs, but for the moment we have taken the pragmatic view that for the immediate future Zoo parking is likely to continue.

Request for Letters

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

Please email fodagcontent@gmail.com

News: Inspector Rejects Downs Cafe Plan

The plans for a new café on the Downs have been turned down by a Government planning inspector.

The plan included replacing the old dilapidated public toilets at Sea Walls, with the café profits used to keep the toilets open, maintained and free of charge for the public.

Permission for the steel and glass café at Sea Walls was granted by Bristol City Council last year; but the venture requires government approval before it is built because of its location on common land. The Commons Act 2016 requires permission from the environment secretary before any structure is built on common land and the planning inspectorate makes such decisions on behalf of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

An official request to build on the Downs was sent to Defra back in April last year. In November the planning inspectorate officially refused consent for the work citing potential harm to the local neighbourhood and the landscape, and because the alleged benefits of the cafe had not been “adequately demonstrated”.

But the Downs Committee, which is behind the plans, has said it is not the end of the line for this project. Cllr Don Alexander, who sits on the committee, said it would be up to the Downs Committee to decide how to move forward. *“We have the right to resubmit the application or give up and do something else,”* he added. *“We need to make the toilets at the Sea Walls economically sustainable.”*

“The current state of the toilet block is not acceptable as it is and is also costing a lot of money. Something has to be done.”

A decision on whether to move forward with the current scheme or to withdraw it and start again will be made at a Downs Committee meeting later this month.

Source Bristol Post

COMMENT: FODAG acknowledges the Planning Inspectors comments and recognises the sensitivity and iconic status of the proposed location. However, the Inspectors rejection raises the possibility that the public toilets

News: Inspector Rejects Downs Cafe Plan

as they are will no longer be sustainable. The block as it stands is no longer fit for purpose, susceptible to vandalism and prohibitively expensive to maintain.

Without the income that the café would have generated the future of this well used facility is now in doubt. In addition, the café would have also provided a much-needed education facility.

STOP PRESS The Downs committee will consider and address the Inspectors comments, with a view to resubmitting a revised application.

Good News: Support FODAG at Waitrose

FOD+AG will be one of the charities supported by the green token scheme run by Waitrose in February. I hope you will feel able to support our cause if you shop at the supermarket in Henleaze. Please use your tokens and encourage your friends to do so during February. Well done to Martin Collins who made the application.

Noticeboard: Events

Dead Hedging Maintenance: Sunday 2nd February 10:00am Working parties to help maintain the hedges and remove invasive weeds. Essential to sign up with Robin Haward 0117 974 3385 or

email: robinhaward@blueyonder.co.uk

Also work on control of scrub on Clifton Camp continues—watch the website for details.

Deep Litter Collection—Saturday 29th February 10:00am Venue:tba, - thereafter last Saturday of the month email: martinandglen@hotmail.com.

Talk: 'New Hotwells and St Vincent Spring': Friday 6th March 7:30pm at Stoke Bishop Village Hall. A longer version of the talk Paul Wood gave at the 2018 AGM. Note there may be a small charge for this talk.

FODAG Social: Date near the end of May to be confirmed.

The Wildflowers of the Downs: Sunday June 7th 10.00 - 12.00am - discover and explore with local ecologist Neill Talbot. There will be a small charge for this event. Sign up with the events team

Email: robinhaward@blueyonder.co.uk

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

AGM: Wednesday 16th September 7.00pm.Redland Green Bowls Club

COMMITTEE:

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

SECRETARY: (Jac Solomon)

KEY CONTACTS:

Membership: Joan Gubbin

Articles for the Newsletter: Robin Haward / Luke Hudson

Please Note: Deadline for submissions for the Spring edition is 10th April 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://FOD+AG-bristol.weebly.com> 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](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 fodagcontent@gmail.com.