



## Report of the Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge

APRIL 2018

FOD+AG welcome the opportunity to update the Downs Committee on our most recent activities.

FOD+AG remains committed to its core values to represent legitimate users of the Downs and reaffirms its commitment to support the City Council and the Downs committee in the governance of the Downs.

As reported in January, annual maintenance and repairs to the Victorian steps had been planned as part of our winter works programme. This project has now been completed and we are pleased to report that the steps and footpath remain in relatively good order.

Early in February FOD+AG volunteers renovated the dead hedges. These are the hurdle like structures you see all along Circular Road and are designed as a simple and cost effective method to deflect joggers away from sensitive meadow areas.

Again in February volunteers met for Conservation Sunday. This is also part of our winter programme and is the fifth event of this kind. Volunteers have contributed over seventy hours to a variety of tasks including scrub removal and managing encroaching Ivy.

FOD+AG Litter collectors were out in force in February. Twenty two intrepid womblers divided into three separate groups to tackle litter from some of the most inaccessible parts of the Downs. 44 volunteer hours were recorded and over 30 black sacks of assorted litter and debris collected. The final litter pick of the winter was completed at the end of last month and targeted the Zoo Bank to Ladies Mile and the Dumps to Fountains Hill.

Volunteers continue to assist the Downs team with regular weekend goat monitoring.

Early in February FOD+AG held a members social evening at St John's School. The popular event was to celebrate ten years of FOD+AG. The event was well attended and provided an opportunity for our members to reflect on the last ten years and to express their views about a wide range of Downs related issues. Common themes and concerns from our members included,

The future of the Downs, austerity cuts and income generation.

Inappropriate uses of the Downs.

Zoo Parking and the importance of maximising income for the Downs.

Cycling on the Downs.

A timeline of a few of the FOD+AG achievements over the last ten years is included with the report.

FODAG congratulates the Downs Committee on its commitment to public convenience provision on the Downs and remain optimistic that the committee will be able to preserve some of the other unique features of the Downs.

The Downs Committee may be aware that the Bristol Parks Forum is proposing to the City Council an alternative business model for our Parks. To be known as a Foundation the Parks would remain in the ownership of the Council but be managed differently. The main advantage being that a Foundation would be able to apply for grants and funding opportunities currently denied to the Council.

Should a Foundation type business model prove acceptable the role of the volunteer will become much more significant, however FOD+AG reassert **its** commitment not to carry out day to day activities normally done by the Downs team.

FOD+AG support the aims and aspirations of the Parks Forum and would be keen to explore any viable alternative that allows all our parks including the Downs to flourish.

Volunteers from FOD+AG will shortly undertake the repainting of the Downs 'White Tree' The definitive history of why this tree was originally painted white is not fully substantiated but is thought to date back to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and to have been a marker to assist travellers as they made their way across the Downs at night. FOD+AG are pleased to keep this quaint tradition alive.

In acknowledgement of the important work undertaken by volunteers The Downs Commoners have donated a significant sum to FOD+AG. This will be used for a variety of projects in support of the Downs.

FOD+AG committee member Richard Bland has recently compiled a fascinating history of the Downs avenues. There are in fact 21 different avenues across the Downs, nearly nine hundred metres in total length and comprising over twenty different tree species.

This informative piece of work can be downloaded from the FOD+AG website.

Working with the Avon Gorge Wildlife Project and other partners we will be offering a wide range of activities throughout spring and into summer. Walks, talks, bird identification, plant sketching and tree tours will all be available.

Later in the summer as part of a national initiative our important work monitoring butterflies will also continue.

