

Friends of the Avon New Cut Newsletter 25 – Spring 2016



Welcome to our Spring 2016 Newsletter! You will note that it is a little longer than usual as we have been particularly busy over the past four months. We also wanted to include news of other events that are happening locally which we feel may be of interest FrANC members.

Forthcoming Events

FrANC Open Meeting on Sunday 3rd April

Join us at 2:00pm in the upstairs room of Nova Scotia pub to give your thoughts on FrANC activities, planning for an event to celebrate FrANC's 10th birthday and to learn about the progress we have made in relation to spending the "Sharing Heritage" grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Illustrated Talk on the History of the Bristol Docks on Thursday 21st April

This talk will be held at the Southville Centre and will start at 6:45pm. John Penny, from the Bristol Records Office, will present a pot-pourri of 20th century archive film of the Bristol City Docks in operation. From the 1930s until the late 1980s, the Port of Bristol Authority periodically made films about their docks in Bristol, Portishead and Avonmouth. This archive footage will be used to show just how busy the Floating Harbour was during this period – a facility which could not have existed without the New Cut having been constructed.

Tree Walk along York Road Riverbank on Sunday June 5th

This walk will start at 10:00am and will focus on the area between the Bedminster and Bath Road Bridges. Richard Bland (Bristol Naturalists' Society) will be leading this walk – by popular request following his most interesting guided walk last September.

Big Butterfly Count 2016

This year's **Big Butterfly Count** will run from **15th July to 7th August**. This is an annual nationwide event organised by *Butterfly Conservation*. As a contribution to this, FrANC will be organising another survey of Butterfly Junction, as has been done during the past two years. Of interest this year will be to what extent the adjacent MetroBus works has affected the local butterfly and moth population. Further details of how to participate in the survey will be distributed towards the end of June.



Other Walking Events

We are also planning to organise two additional walks later in the year:

- a **Geological Walk** between the Cumberland Basin and the Avon Gorge (as far as Clifton Suspension Bridge)
- a walk around Bedminster and Southville that will trace the area's **Coal Mining Heritage**

Further information concerning both of these walking events will be made available at a later date.

Underfall Yard Visitor Centre

The official opening of the new Visitor Centre at the Underfall Yard is set for **Friday 18th March**. Admission is free and it will be open every day from 10:00am. From Easter to October the closing time will be 5:00pm; a slightly earlier close time in winter months of 4:00pm is proposed. More information about the many planned events can be found on the Underfall Yard website; visit www.underfallboatyard.co.uk.

If you are interested in volunteering at the Underfall Yard, email Sarah Murray at sarah@underfallboatyard.co.uk.

Progress on activities funded by “Sharing Heritage” grant

Towards the end of last year we were awarded a £9,900 “Sharing Heritage” grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund to improve the area between Bathurst Basin and Bath Road Bridge.

Overgrown trees, brambles and vegetation along York Road riverbank have now been cut back by *Volunteering Matters* to enable a start to be made on the clearance of litter.

The layout of two new Interpretation Boards, to be located at Bathurst Basin and on the Bath Road Bridge, has been finalised by the FrANC Committee and is nearly ready to pass on to the designers. We are hoping that both boards will be in situ by the early summer.

There has also been progress regarding the proposed new benches for Clarence/York Road. At the time of writing, we have established which types of bench are acceptable to the City Council. Some Council officers have also been assisting us by checking the location of utilities in the area (you don't want a bench placed in the vicinity of water mains or underground cables!) and liaising with police about their views on the proposed sites. Once these issues are resolved we'll be able to consult on the precise location of the benches with FrANC members and relevant community groups.

We have not yet started to consider the planned leaflet describing a walk around the New Cut. We look forward to your thoughts/suggestions and input in due course.

Website News

We have also recently been awarded £1,000 from City Council Local Nature Reserve (LNR) funds towards the building of a new website for FrANC – one that can be more easily updated and will enable FrANC members and the wider community to have easier access to the material stored there. We are in negotiations with the University of the West of England (UWE) who we are hoping can provide the technical expertise to achieve this. There will be a chance for you to give us your thoughts at the Open Meeting on 3rd April.

Clearance of rubbish from New Cut riverbed

With the Avon New Cut having been awarded Local Nature Reserve (LNR) status in September last year, FrANC is keen to continue to enhance its profile and make it an even better place for people to visit.

In addition to our regular Clean-ups and meadow management activities, we want to find a way of removing the rubbish (trolleys, scaffolding poles, road signs and bicycles) from the New Cut riverbed. If you have any links with groups or firms who may have the correct equipment and skills to achieve the removal of some or all of this debris then please get in touch! There is a small pot of City Council money set aside to help achieve this, but to date we have yet to identify a definitive way forward. Typical examples of the challenge we are facing are shown below.



Abandoned supermarket trolley.....



.....and bollard!

Create Centre Exhibition

The Create Centre will host an exhibition during the Easter holiday period, from **Monday 4th to Wednesday 13th April**. Visitors will be able to find out more about the construction of the MetroBus guided busway and the refurbishment of Ashton Avenue Swing Bridge. Old photographs of the Grade 2 listed bridge from the Bristol Record Office collection will also be on show. The Create Centre is open Monday to Friday from 9:00am to 5:00pm. A special children's activity session will take place on Wednesday 6th April from 2:00pm to 5:00pm.

No Newsletter would be complete without mention of LITTER!

So far we have completed nearly twice the number of Riverbank Clean-ups that FrANC members usually undertake in a year.

We started the year with our annual litter-picking session along Coronation Road on 9th January, followed by Cumberland Road on 20th February. Both of these Clean-ups were well-supported by volunteers from FrANC, especially the latter considering the inclement weather we experienced (see below).



We have also undertaken some additional “impromptu” Clean-ups along the York Road riverbank. This area had been seriously neglected for a long time and so, using monies from the “Sharing Heritage” grant, we have joined with others to enhance the area considerably.

You could have furnished a flat with the furniture that had been dumped there, and our thanks go to the *ParkWork* team for hauling it out. *Volunteering Matters* (previously known as *Community Service Volunteers*) have also done a great job cutting back the trees and vegetation with their power tools, with assistance from *ParkWork*.

As a result of this exercise, MANY years' worth of rubbish has been uncovered. The three FrANC litter-picking sessions organised so far have at times resembled archaeological digs.....once you cleared the first ten years' worth, there was another layer to tackle.

Further Clean-ups will be necessary in order to complete the mammoth task of removing rubbish and litter from the entire length of the York Road riverbank. At the time of going to

press, we are hoping to enlist help from some volunteering students at a future date. The City Council's waste disposal teams have also been really helpful in collecting all the bagged rubbish that we left stacked on the pavement. A big “thank you” to everyone – a real community effort.



Rubbish collected during York Road Riverbank Clean-up on 14th March

Bristol Naturalists' Society (author: Margaret Fay)

The Bristol Naturalists' Society began life as a group of naturalists and scientists with a shared enthusiasm for all aspects of the natural world.

Membership has expanded to include anyone who shares these interests, and nowadays it has a varied membership across all ages. Becoming a member entitles you to attend all the events that are arranged each month. These include:

- A monthly printed newsletter, and two annual nature reports
- Monthly nature walks around Bristol, North Somerset and South Glos.
- Regular talks hosted by experts on various topics
- Opportunities to take part in periodic Bioblitzes, Ornithology and Geology surveys

An example of the events put on for March offers:

- 3 Walks – Litton; Toll Roads and Fountains; Blaise
- 3 Talks – Wetlands; Bumblebees; Leafcutter Ants
- 1 Mammal field meeting
- 1 Geological dig

If you are interested and want to find out more, visit www.bristolnats.org.uk.

Five FrANCs go back to school (author: Tess Green)

It was cold, wet and windy when five FrANC members arrived at the training centre in Ashton Court for the City Council's Health and Safety (H&S) training. We joined people from other voluntary green space groups and made up nearly half the group for the day course.



FrANC attendees at H&S Training Course (left to right: Tess Green, Richard Clutterbuck, Chris Hanmer, Ed Hall and Phil Cass)

I think many of us had slightly gung-ho attitudes to H&S to begin with but, as we were introduced to the concept of recognising hazards and calculating risks, we quickly became serious and engrossed in the subject. After all, when we work for FrANC, we are bounded by busy roads on one side and slippery banks of a deep tidal river on the other and some of our volunteers seem to love taking risks.

After some classroom learning, we were divided into groups to carry out a practical assessment of a typical outdoor voluntary task. Several of the FrANC bunch were assigned to the Ashton Court pond for this, but this hardly came near the conditions usually experienced by FrANC volunteers. We learned how to assess the task critically and to reduce risks as far as possible. The weather had brightened by then so it was good to be outside.

You will be glad to know that we now know how to carry out a risk assessment for all FrANC activities, understand the need for equipment like gloves and litter pickers and how to store and carry tools and much more. We also have certificates, which show that we are competent to lead on H&S!

Sara Worth and Derek Hughes had previously carried out the H&S training but, with large groups of us working or studying on the riverbank, it will be good to have more people sharing the work of looking after safety.

Next time you volunteer with FrANC, don't be surprised if you get a pep talk on safe working before we start and reminders during the session about best practice (Committee Members take note as some of you are in the risk-happy group!).

If any other member is inspired to attend the training, I think we would all recommend it as an interesting day of good quality training. Those who have done this basic course could also be invited to further training on the use of traditional or power tools.

And finally.....



Coffee, cake and a chance to chat are an important part of a good morning's work! You are welcome to join us!

Friends of the Avon New Cut (FrANC)

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Website: www.franc.org.uk

If you are not on our mailing list and you would like to be, please contact us through the above website or via our Secretary, Derek Hughes (Tel: 0117 954 4888)