



Lane Cove National Park is an important bushland park and habitat corridor in the heart of our city of Sydney.

[Friends of LCNP](#) have been helping to conserve and protect it for more than 25 years. In that time, they have raised more than \$1.8 million in grants and donations and contributed more than \$5 million worth of volunteer labour.

Fairyland (Portions 385 and 386)

The area of these two portions descends from the Delhi Road ridge to the river in moderately steep sandstone slopes clothed in dry sclerophyll woodland typical of the valley's sides. A short creek drains these slopes, crossing a flat, amphitheatre shape area to the river. This creek is fed by springs and has thus attracted people from the aborigines on (it is claimed there are carvings, spear grinding grooves and middens near the creek above the flat but these have not been located).

The exact nature of the flat area and how swampy it was at the time of white settlement is unclear. It was certainly settled early with a hut located on the western side of the creek on slightly higher ground by 1831. The 1847 map shows an encroachment here and other families are reputed to have lived in the area last century.

This part of the Field of Mars was not subdivided until 1896. Portions 385 and 386 were purchased by members of the Swan family in 1898. Prior to their purchase they had been weekend trippers on the river in this area, hiring a boat from Figtree rowing up the river and camping on this site. At this time the several acres of flat land were covered in melaleucas, casuarinas (swamp oaks) and bracken fern (ibid) indicating low-lying but normally relatively dry land (these trees are found near the river on the slightly higher areas, such as levees).

The flat area was cleared and a market garden established and in the late 1890'S strawberries were grown on the western side of the creek and watermelons on the larger area on the east. At least part of this land was relatively moist due to the effect of springs. It seems there may be some underground springs in the flat area as well as those upslope in the creek bed. Swamp oaks were planted along the riverbank (from which they had possibly been removed by the earlier squatters) and the now large camphor laurel was planted. A jetty was also put in and weekender houses for the family and shacks for the workers were built in the bushland above the flat area.

The general development of rowing and picnicking along the river led to picnickers calling in for strawberries and cream and eventually to phasing out of the market garden between 1905 and 1910 and development of the area solely as first picnic and later pleasure, grounds. In 1909 Robert Campbell Swan became the sole proprietor.

Pleasure ground equipment was brought in or built and a soft fern known as Tender Brake (*Pteris tremula*) (a NSW native) was planted with the phoenix palm, pines and other exotics. Whether it had been originally, the flat area was now liable to floods (caused or exacerbated by silting of the river and settlement in the catchment) and were kept as open grassed areas for games and races. Over the years the existing creek was deepened and other drainage channels dug. The creek inlet was filled in with sand from the 1909–10 dredging and a simple tidal gate installed to control the flow.

Various shelter sheds and an open Dance Hall (built 1930) were built on the higher ground close to the river. Some of these including the Dance Hall survived until burnt down by the Lane Cove River State Recreation Area Trust in 1980 (they were concerned about possible vandalism!). The area was operated almost continuously by the Swan family from early in the century until the late 1960s. It was sold in 1972 (upper bushland section) and 1977 (riverside section) for addition to the SRA as the area had been zoned open space County of Cumberland Plan.

In the few year since it ceased operations all the buildings and installations have over the years been destroyed and only traces of Fairyland remain. The bushland slopes have changed little over the years with only minimal development (Swan family housing and an access road). Picking wildflowers by visitors to Fairyland was not permitted and there is still little development on the ridge above to affect this downslope area. Today the bushland sufficiently open to support a relative profusion of wildflower ground species such as Flannel flower.

However, the flat area has undergone considerable changes over the years. It has now become a fresh water swamp of rushes and grasses with a considerable number of camphor laurels have seeded from the early planting. Pratt states this is a 'reversion' whilst SRA plans for this area also accept this as a reversion to its former 'natural state'. However, the historical evidence, scanty though it is, does not support this contention. It has always been a relatively low-lying area, possibly always subject to sporadic flooding and with some moister areas due to the influence of springs. However, it is unlikely that it was swamp with a permanent body of fresh water as it is at present. As a swamp it would have provided no attraction for the squatters who used it prior the Common subdivision. It is also highly unlikely that the Swans, a relatively well-off family, able to afford to purchase and run this area as a weekend retreat

employing others to work it, would have purchased a swamp as a market garden, particularly as all the river flat portions just upstream were on sale at the same time and passed in several times.

In addition, there is some evidence of the species growing on the flat area at this time, i.e. ti-trees, paperbarks, swamp oaks and bracken fern. These do not indicate a wet swamp habitat. It is quite likely that the various alterations to the drainage of the site made during the Swans occupation ego filling the creek Inlet and its closure by a tidal gate when not operated and maintained, have disrupted the former drainage pattern of the site, effectively damming the waters of the springs and allowing a freshwater swamp to develop. This creek once deep enough for fish is now only a few centimetres deep where it flows from the swamp to the river. It is also possible that flooding of the river with its heavy loads of silt exacerbated the problem by further building up the levee and filling lines of natural drainage.

Illegal logging occurred at the Fairyland site as early as 1834. By 1847 at least ten people were listed as living in the area. In 1895, the state government sold blocks of land beside the river. Robert Joshua Campbell Swan (1864 to 1943) and other family members purchased Portions 385 and 386 of Field of Mars for £141. Around 1900 the natural forest country was cleared for agriculture by the Swan family. Many different crops were grown including strawberries and watermelons. New Zealand flax was grown to tie parcels of fruit. By 1905 the property had acquired a name, The Rest. Between 1905 and 1910 the market gardens were phased out.



After noticing the success of the Avenue Pleasure Grounds downstream at the Fig Tree Bridge and the Fern Bay Pleasure Grounds at Drummoyne, the Swan family then changed the area for recreation.

They planted exotic plant species such as the camphor laurel and date palm. Placing painted fairy-tale figures on trees, and carved fairy like wooden figures were placed in the grounds, such as Little Bo Peep. There was a slippery-dip in the shape of a sleeping giant, supposedly based on the character 'Brutus' from Popeye. Other features were the wooden pirate boat, tiny tots and the upside-down house. Fairyland soon became popular and successful. Fairyland offered a more enticing prospect than its two rivals, mainly due to a more remote and appealing location.

Access to the ground was mostly by ferry. A wharf was built on the river. Some boats would take up to 70 passengers at a time. Two of the craft regularly visiting Fairylands were the Escort and the Twilight. In 1918, when the Upper Lane Cove River Ferry Company closed, Fairyland acquired some of their ferries to be part of Fairyland's operations. Church groups, schools, companies and families used the area for picnics and recreation.

In the mid-20th century, Fairyland lost much of its popular appeal. Particularly with the expanding suburbs of Sydney, the diminishing remoteness, the rise of the motor car and the opening of the Epping Road bridge. After a series of floods in 1967, 1968 and 1969 Fairyland closed. The area was purchased by the National Parks of New South Wales in the late 1970s. Little evidence of the park exists today, particularly after the severe fires of 1994. The access road off Delhi Road is currently closed, overgrown and barely recognisable. A pair of rusted gate holders and some asphalts are all that remain.

After the area was abandoned, invasive weeds have been particularly troublesome. Much work by bush regenerators has continued into the 21st century. Today, the 42 hectare area is home to three endangered ecological communities. Notable wildlife so close to the city of Sydney here includes the Powerful Owl, Osprey and Echidna. Fairyland is on the Great North Walk.

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