

"Out of S.T.E.P." .

An Account of South Turramurra's
Opposition to the Ku-ring-gai
Council's Proposal of Building
a Major Netball Complex in the
Area in 1978.

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THE BACKGROUND

Sydney's urban bushland is dwindling. Inroads are being continually made on it by an expanding metropolis. Those who live on the bush's fringe often do so by choice. Certainly the land value might be lower, transport prove a problem, and local shops be few, but some people are prepared to put up with such inconveniences in order to enjoy a bush outlook or easy access to bush. South Turramurra is such an area, a quiet backwash in busy Sydney.

The suburb is situated on a ridge, that extends like a finger down from the Pacific Highway at Turramurra. Kissing Point Road runs along the spine, and roads branch off at right angles all the way down. The only major intersecting road is the Comenarra Parkway, which bisects Kissing Point Road just below Turramurra Public School. Below this junction most of the streets which go off Kissing Point Road run into the bush, so apart from the residents' cars there is little movement in the area except at weekends when sporting persons descend like locusts to use the two ovals and netball complex.

Everyone who settles below the Comenarra junction remarks on the friendliness of the area. There is good reason for this. The tiny peninsula contains not only a kindergarten and primary school, but also the high school. Four churches, a small group of shops and

service station are there too, all within easy walking distance of most. So with the community's basic needs at hand, at a distance from the hustle and bustle of Turrumurra, and separated by bush from adjoining suburbs it is not hard to see why there has developed a quietly friendly, united bunch of people. One is continually meeting one's neighbours at church, the school, the shops, in the bush or on the ovals. The children all know each other, and as two car families were less prevalent in the 1970's than today in 1984, mothers either formed friendships with neighbours or led an isolated existence.

In 1978 a predominance of young middle-income families lived in South Turrumurra, with a sprinkling of retired pensioners and high income earners. Building blocks were on the whole, larger than average, and houses ranged from the two-bedroomed fibro to the larger four-bedroomed brick veneer. There were few building blocks left by then, and most thought that the remaining bush not zoned for future road development, belonged to the upper reaches of the Lane Cove Valley Park. Hence it was with shocked surprise that the residents below the Comenarra intersection greeted the news, that twelve acres of their bush was to be bulldozed to make way for a netball complex. There were already courts nearby on the Comenarra, so no one could immediately see why a completely new set were needed.

The saga began on the 4th March 1978 when Greg Bloomfield of Canoon Road told John Booth of Kingsford Avenue that he had heard that Ku-ring-gai Council had drawn up plans for a netball complex, to be situated on some bushland at the end of Canoon Road. On the 6th March, Margaret, John's wife rang the Council to enquire about the project, and was given a few details. The same day Greg went to the Council to see what he could discover, but met with no co-operation. John then rang Dr. Tom Atcheson, president of the Kissing Point Progress Association. He asked him to call a public meeting so that South Turramurra residents could meet to discuss the project. Dr. Atcheson told John he knew of the project, but did not believe work was going to start on it for a while. He refused to call a meeting because John was not a member of the Association. When John told Greg this, Greg promptly joined the Progress Association and requested a meeting be called. This was duly done, the date set, ^{consequently} being Wednesday 29th March.

The Progress Association said they would organise the letter box drop and most residents received notification of the meeting on Tuesday 28th March. The notice stated that a meeting was to be held on the 29th March, re a "proposed" development at the end of Canoon Road. (S.T.E.P. file on confrontation.) The timing was disastrous. First it was Easter and many were away, secondly there was a mail strike at the time, so few were checking their letterboxes,

and thirdly, many, including residents living at the affected end of Canoon Road, never received a notice at all. It resulted in a meeting attended by few residents, a large number of netball players, and children. At the meeting's end an open vote was taken and many children in attendance were permitted to vote. Consequently at this 'public meeting' it was resolved that work should commence on the Canoon Road Netball Complex.

ALL ABOUT THE SITE

This site on which the Ku-ring-gai Council proposed building a netball complex, was on a ridge that protruded into the upper reaches of the Lane Cove River Valley. Ridges are easy to develop, so it is not surprising that there are few ridges left untouched within urban Sydney. Vegetation on Sydney's ridgetops is different to that found in the valleys. What was so unique about the Canoon Road ridge was that as well as being virgin, weed-free vegetation, it was easily accessible to anyone who wished to observe, or just enjoy the flora and fauna found there. Unusually for Sydney, many living in South Turramurra were aware of this and gained much enjoyment there from passive recreational pursuits.

While walking in the bush they had observed the increased run-off caused by urban development. This had led to

erosion, siltation of the river and weed invasion. No where was it more obvious than at Brown's water hole, a once much used place by the locals to cool off on steaming summer's day. Now, it was a muddy, shallow, polluted privet infested spot. Another important point about the ridge was that vegetation found there included much honey-producing flora, e.g. *Banksia erica folia*. Local ornithologists knew that this area was used by the Tasmanian Silver-eye on its migratory route south from Queensland as well as supporting numbers of other honey-eaters. Added interest to bird watchers was, that it was a known habitat of the rare bird of prey, the Peregrine Falcon, one of the world's most threatened species. Intrusion into its habitat would certainly prevent it from using the locality in the future, and could aid its decline. In December 1976 a disastrous fire had swept across the ridge. By 1978 it was obvious the bush was regenerating well. The news that this was to be bulldozed hit the residents like a bombshell, and contrary to their belief, found the ridge belonged to Ku-ring-gai Municipal Council.

The land in question - designated as being situated by (the as yet unmade) Riverview Avenue of approximately 6,187 square metres, was granted to the Cumberland County Council under a Deed of Trust in 1926. In the late

1950's it was transferred to the Ku-ring-gai Council and zoned 10A, that is for not necessarily active recreation. Later, under the State Planning Authority Act of 1963, the New South Wales Planning and Environment Commission of 12th August 1977 directed that the land already described be "for use only as a public park, public reserve, or public recreation area for passive recreational purposes and that no "building or structure" be erected "without prior consent of the Commission". (Government Gazette No. 89 of 12th August, 1977).

In march 1973 the Ku-ring-gai Council had sent a copy of Plan A260 to the State Planning Authority for comment. Plan A260 proposed constructing "16 netball courts on the higher land near Riverview Avenue" and a playing field to the west of them; all being on the northern side of Canoon Road. This plan had been resolved by Council on the 7th December 1972, and subsequently advertised and exhibited. The State Planning Authority replied by referring to the terms of the original Deed of Trust which required Council to consult with it re any building proposal. The Authority added "Council may make its own determination with regard to the establishment of playing fields and netball courts". Then concluded with, "It is considered that the playing field as outlined in the plan of the proposal, are not appropriate due to the existing characteristics of slope

and rock out crops. The area represents a very good example of typical Hawkesbury sandstone vegetation containing a clear zonation of plant associations having considerable potential and value for passive recreation purposes. Consequently the Authority does not favour the construction of playing fields as proposed".

(Photocopy of Authority's comment in S.T.E.P. file on the dispute). Because of the above comment on Plan A260, Council decided to limit the extent of the development.

There the matter rested for a while until in 1977 the Ad Hoc Committee was formed. This committee was made up of Aldermen Richard Lennon, The Mayor, Yolanda Lee, Deputy-Mayor, Brian Taylor and Alan Wilkie. Lennon and Lee were the elected representatives of the Comenarra Ward included in which was South Turramurra. On the 5th December, at the weekly Council meeting, the Ad Hoc Committee recommended that "Council adopt Plan AA260/77/2 providing for 25 Netball Courts, parking for 266 cars and possible site for a building. The cost be covered by \$191,000 taken from Council funds, plus \$81,800 taken from "Council's Tennis Court Reserve". The latter amount was allowable for "nine courts at the south/eastern corner of the site" were to be given all weather surfacing so that they could "be used by netball in winter and tennis in summer". (Ku-ring-gai Council Minutes, 5.12.77 p.10). With little debate, the recommendation was unanimously passed.

The decision was reported on the 6th December in the Hornsby Advocate Courier on the bottom inside corner, of the second to back page. This is a small paper and often treated as a throwaway. The same newspaper on the 28th December had a second quite prominent article on its back page. At that date many were away and it again went unnoticed. In neither article was a starting date mentioned.

THE BATTLE

Suddenly without warning on the 4th April 1978 at 11 a.m. bulldozing began. Three housewives who lived near, incensed by the senseless destruction, stood before the dozers and refused to budge. A heated exchange followed, and eventually the workmen packed up and left the site, though not before an area had been damaged. Quickly the three women called up friends and held a small meeting on the site at mid-day that day. Then and there, those first few, resolved to fight the issue.

Alderman Richard Lennon was contacted and he agreed to meet with the residents on site at 5 p.m. That evening approximately sixty angry residents greeted Alderman Lennon when he arrived. He denied that the residents had not had an adequate hearing, but agreed to a stay of work until the

next Council meeting on Monday 10th April 1978. Lennon suggested South Turrumurra call another public meeting and defined the area to be letterboxed as below the Kissing Point - Comenarra intersection. Overall, Lennon appeared adamant that the work would continue. On site with Alderman Lennon, was the Council's Public Relations Officer. He stated that it was up to the residents to take an interest in local affairs. The netball proposal had come up at a meeting open to the public, and if the residents were unable to attend, the agenda was available for all to see at the local libraries. Greg Bloomfield brushed these remarks aside saying that "Council had made no attempt to tell nearby residents about the plan" and that "Council was elected to do things that fit in with the community". (North Shore Times, 19.4.77. P.1). Another resident remarked that there seemed no point in Council spending approximately \$300,000 to build more netball courts when there were already twenty-six nearby. It just was senseless destruction of bushland and a waste of rate payers money. (Ibid., p.1)

On Thursday 6th April a few South Turrumurra residents met with Aldermen Lennon and Lee. Throughout the meeting, both Aldermen remained impervious to any consideration for a possible alternative site. Lennon did reluctantly say, that if after a second public meeting, 50% of the residents

opposed the project, he would ask Council to call a halt.

South Turramurra was letterboxed about a further public meeting that week, on Saturday 8th April. Even at such short notice, most residents made a point of being there. Aldermen Lennon and Lee also attended. At the meeting speakers drew Aldermen Lennon and Lee's attention to the fact that no environmental impact study had been done despite Council's own ruling on this. It had been discovered that prompted by a booklet from the State Pollution Control Commission, and a report from the Town Planner, Resolution No. 1362 had been passed on 7.4.75. (Council minutes. 7.4.75. P.15). The resolution stated that the Council "require specifically an Environmental Impact Statement" for: -

- projects which have unique natural ... features on either public or private lands ...
- projects which it may deem to have an adverse effect on the environment ...
- Council require an environmental report from an independent registered consultant ...
- not give any consideration to any development likely to have an impact on the environment which is not accompanied by an Environmental Impact Statement ... (Ibid. p.15)

By 300 votes to 85, or a 77% majority the meeting condemned Council's proposal and asked that it be abandoned immediately. Establishment at this gathering was the system of Proxy Voting. This brought community members on a par with company shareholders, whose right to vote by proxy was established in the Companies Act in 1961. (Community Unity, April, 1978. P. 3). It enabled residents to vote on all matters connected with the community, without personally having to attend the meeting. Strict control on the 8th March of both proxy and personal votes by use of the Council Roll satisfied scrutineers from all sides that no one voted twice.

A report of the meeting was sent to the Town Clerk, but neither he nor the Aldermen, saw fit to mention this at the Council meeting on Monday 10th April. Two petitions were tabled before Council that night. One from the Netball Association and one from the residents of South Turramurra. There was no debate and in about two minutes Council decided to continue the project.

Tuesday 11th April dawned, and small dozers moved in. They were met by about sixty angry women. Alderman Lennon came down to the site and said, "I hate destroying the bush, but 1,232 people have petitioned for the courts, with only 261 against". (Telegraph, 12.4.78. P.3.).

He did not mention ^{that} the 1,232 signatures were from netball players and few residents of South Turrumurra. The 261 figure did not seem to tally with any South Turrumurra knew about, but as it was impossible to verify, they had to swallow the facts being splashed over the local papers. It made South Turrumurra appear rather selfish.

At 5.15 a.m. on the 12th April, Canon Road was woken up by the noise of a big bulldozer being brought in. Supporters rushed to the site and again stood before the dozer. Eventually the driver went home in the afternoon without using the machine. On site talks were once more held between Aldermen Lennon and Lee. Heated words were exchanged. Alderman Lennon stated he felt the area was 'socio-economically' deprived and harboured the highest rate of vandalism in the municipality. It was true, that South Turrumurra on an average, had a lower per capita income compared to the rest of Ku-ring-gai, but there was no evidence to suggest that it was deprived. A former Anglican minister of the parish had earlier said to his successor, that he had found those who suffered serious economic problems in South Turrumurra seemed to sell up and leave. There was immediate response to the accusation about the area harbouring vandals. Probably some did live in South Turrumurra, but many came from elsewhere. It was a known fact that many young drivers

used the Comenarra as a speedway, and often zipped into South Turrumurra to 'burn' around, before buzzing out again. On the way through the quiet streets, they often stopped to do a little damage.

Aldermen Lennon also remarked that the needs of 2,000 women players had to be considered. "I feel", he said, "that this small number of residents is being slightly selfish, and not thinking about the whole community". (Telegraph, 12.4.78. P.3.) At the same time anyone who might help was being contacted. These included Mr. Maddison, the ward's State member, the Minister for Local Government, and Bob Dunne and Vic Fitzgerald, officials of the Federated Engine Driver and Fire Fighters' Union. (F.E.D. & F.A.) The F.E.D. & F.A. was the bulldozer drivers union. Negotiations commenced with them to 'black ban' the project. Alderman Lennon left the site after agreeing to hold another meeting next day in his office, between the nine councillors, and three representatives from both South Turrumurra and the Netball Association. Bob Dunne was given leave to attend as an observer.

That night at 8 p.m. in a resident's home in South Turrumurra, the South Turrumurra Environment Protection

or S.T.E.P. was founded. The meeting agreed, that there would be no compromise made by S.T.E.P. with the Council at the conference on the following day. The bush was to be preserved at all costs, if there must be netball courts, they must be sited elsewhere.

At the meeting in Lennon's office the councillors interrogated the three S.T.E.P. representatives mercilessly. After one and a half hours Bob Dunne left to report to his executive on the issue. As he departed, he said, he believed a moratorium on the project should be called, to enable residents' wishes to be heard. It was only then, that Lennon in his role as Mayor recommended a two week cooling off period between the parties. Did he fear union trouble then, or was he just being wise? Alderman Lennon also suggested the fortnight be spent investigating possible alternative sites within the municipality, but added that, consideration to any alternative would not be given until "surrounding residents gave a nod of approval". (Hornsby Times, 19.4.78. P.2.) S.T.E.P. felt it was a pity that this courtesy had not been extended to them. The Councillors voted upon the recommendation - it was passed by five votes to four. Judith Goadby the Netball Association president said, netball officials would be happy to help protesting residents look for an alternative site. All the Association wanted was to obtain twenty-five new courts. (Advocate Courier. 19.4.78 P.5.)

Following the Mayor's proposal, Mr. Taylor the Town Clerk, wrote to S.T.E.P. saying no more work would be undertaken by Council until after a further meeting to be held on 27th April, 1978. He added that any alternative sites proposed by S.T.E.P. must meet with the Council Engineer's approval regarding "cost feasibility and other desirable aspects". (Letter from Town Clerk, to S.T.E.P. 14.4.78). With a two week reprieve S.T.E.P. set out to seek all possible substitute sites.

THE PROTAGONISTS

I. THE COUNCIL

In 1978 there were ten Aldermen on the Council. Alderman Lennon was the Mayor and an Orthotist by profession. Today he professes little sporting interest apart from golf. (Interview Lennon, 12.7.84). In 1977 he felt the women of Kur-ring-gai were badly disadvantaged and neglected, concerning sporting facilities. He was more than happy to sit on the committee for investigation into a new netball complex. The majority of existing courts were situated on the Comenarra, which was a dangerous road to cross and park along. In 1978 he said he felt South Turramurra was evenly divided on the issue and that only a hard core were "dead against it". (Ibid.,) He added that he had never struck a confrontation before and it "saddened" him. (Ibid.,) As a person he appears to prefer to steer the middle course, so he probably found it most uncomfortable to find he had stirred up a hornets' nest.

Alderman Lee was deputy-Mayor in 1978 and is an accountant by profession. Strangely enough, bushwalking is her only sport. (Interview. Lee, 1.7.84). She stood for Council, because she believed she had something to contribute. Every year she sat in on Council's Sports' Conference. At each meeting there were the annual squabbles between sporting groups over the yearly allocation of sporting fields "Blind Freddy could have seen there was nothing for girls". (Ibid.) When Netball asked for a complex "Soccer said take it from Rugby, and Rugby said take it from Soccer". (Ibid.) After many requests the Netball Association was finally given by Council twelve courts on a Soccer field at Mimosa Road and fourteen on the Comenarra Parkway. "Because Soccer felt", Alderman Lee said, "that Mimosa belonged to them, there was an annual argument from the Soccer Association about whether the Netball Association really needed it". With that in mind Alderman Lee decided to "champion the girls", and at the same time give the South Turramurra children "tennis courts where they could play and be off the streets". (Ibid.).

Inspiring as that sentiment is there was another less obvious reason. Alderman Lee's husband was the auditor for the Kur-ring-gai Soccer Association then. The Association was busy negotiating at the time, with the Council, to build a large licensed Soccer complex on the old quarry site at

West Pymble. Soccer knew, that if it secured the quarry site, it would need back up fields to support its main complex, when there were large competition days. These facts began to emerge after Greg Bloomfield had called at the Land and Environment Commission asking for information about alternative available sites. On telling his story he was told by the gentleman there "First find out who wants Mimosa, that's always the reason". (Interview, Greg Bloomfield, 1.7.84). It did not take long to discover the vested interest Alderman Lee had in the whole affair.

Alderman Lee reiterated several times that only seven acres were to be bitumined. That was true, but five additional acres were to be left between courts which Council planned to beautify. S.T.E.P. pointed out to her that these strips would not remain bushland for long, they would eventually be trampled to death. When S.T.E.P. presented to Council a properly prepared Impact Statement, Alderman Lee was one of the Aldermen who *adamantly* refused to accept it. Throughout the whole affair both Lennon and Lee consistently supported the Netball Association. They obviously believed that was where the votes lay. This was to prove a fallacy, for Alderman Lee lost her seat in the next Council election and Lennon retained his with a lessened majority.

Throughout the bitter battle only one Alderman, Eric Hahn appeared concerned for the residents. On the 22nd May, 1978 he directed a question through the Mayor to the Town Clerk regarding Council's policy on whether an Environmental Impact Statement was required. The Town Clerk replied that the Canoon Road Complex did not need such a statement, and referred to Council Resolutions of 1973 and 1974 to support this. However he had overlooked the Resolution passed on 7. 4.75 (mentioned earlier), and which had been previously pointed out to Aldermen Lennon and Lee at the Public meeting on the 8th April. The Council consistently refused to acknowledge the existence of this Resolution, until two officers from the State Planning Pollution Commission (S.P.C.C.) drew Council's attention to it on the 24th May, 1978.

Another Alderman was Michael Kartzoff. A forester by profession, he was noted for his knowledge and love of the Australian bush. When Council decided an Environmental Impact Statement was called for, Kartzoff and R. G. Burrows, Director of Parks for the Ku-ring-gai Council, together viewed Canoon Road and submitted a Statement to Council on 26th April, 1978. It was terse and brief, and stated "no animal or bird life was observed ... the flora of the area would not encourage any fauna to establish itself ... the establishment of courts and carparks would have no

affect on the remaining flora, either of the ridge top or the Lane Cove River Escarpment, provided drainage is so laid out as to disperse the run-off from paved areas". (Environmental Report. 26. 4.78).

On 14th April 1978 Alderman Kartzoff was sent an initial brief Environmental Impact Report prepared by Dr. Adamson of Macquarie University. Adamson believed that erosion and siltation would occur because of large run-off from cleared areas. Kartzoff disagreed, and disputed Dr. Adamson's claim that weeds would colonize the permanently disturbed edges of the playing areas, and penetrate deeper into the bush, that there was any aesthetic value to the Canoon Road ridge, and few people lived close enough to be affected by noise pollution. The Alderman returned the report with written comments scrawled upon it. At the end he wrote, "A new environment has been created, an ecosystem dominated by man. This environment demands to be complete to survive, Streets, halls, churches AND (Kartzoff's capitals) playfields to cater for the young of the native environment to make it complete. (Impact Report, 14. 4.78) He is also remembered for saying that "Canoon Road bushland was a depauperated burnt out parody". (Interview, Helen Petersen. 30. 6.84). Fine words from a forester.

II. S.T.E.P.

From the first it was apparent that among the socio-economically deprived of South Turramurra there lurked some eloquent citizens of high intelligence and integrity. *As time went on these traits emerged more and more.* At the first meeting of S.T.E.P. on the 12th April 1978, 35% of those present lived in Canoon Road. They were there in force, as they stood to lose most in the way of traffic, noise and even property value. It is interesting to note that a further 28% resided in Kingsford Avenue, a street approximately half a kilometer away from the proposed complex. Kingsford Avenue is a very good example of the co-operative spirit found in South Turramurra. Apart from its normal friendliness, the neighbours had jointly worked out a plan of attack during a bush fire. They even had asked for, and been given a hydrant, hose and firefighting tools by the Fire Department.

The bushland to those foundation members of S.T.E.P. was ruggedly beautiful and precious to them. They understood how essential it was to prevent any further encroachment on the diminishing Sydney bushland. All were home owners, and though few considered themselves 'sporty people', were not a sedentary bunch. Their occupations ranged from the post-graduate doctor to chartered accountant, headmaster, and Maritime Service Board clerk. Those original twenty-eight could be collectively described as active, articulate, educated visionaries.

Throughout the dispute they firmly stood against the Council and attempted to seek alternatives. Afterwards they were accused of being intractable, narrow, non-respectors of property, and extremists who were unable to see anyone else's point of view. Not that the Council ever really attempted to see theirs. Afterwards Greg Bloomfield co-president of S.T.E.P. at the time said, that he and Judith Goadby, who was most approachable, had nearly worked out a mutually acceptable solution, when Council ended it all by moving in on the 29th May with their big dozers. (Interview, G. Bloomfield). S.T.E.P. as a group expected to get discussion with Council and the Netball Association, and achieve a mutual agreement on the matter. They trusted their Aldermen but instead were "conned down the line". "We should have taken out an Injunction, and as we had a good case might have won. Council fostered a negative exercise knowing you conquer people when they are divided". (Ibid.)

III. THE NETBALLERS

In 1978 the Ku-ring-gai Netball Association had twenty-six courts in two areas in South Turramurra. The sites were approximately two kilometres apart. This arrangement was most unsatisfactory to them for several reasons. Their biggest problem was a perennial shortage of referees. Few parents were willing to help solve this, so umpires drove

to and fro between the areas, in the games' intervals. The Association wanted all the courts on one site, so fewer referees would be needed, then this impossible situation would be solved. The courts too were grassed, and dangerous to play on when wet. Netball being a winter sport, the courts were often not dry enough for play at starting time. Finally the Association wanted a clubhouse, and adequate, unhazardous, easily accessible parking. The sport certainly involved many girls. About 2,000 women between the ages of nine and fifty, ^{played each Saturday,} so it was only fair that Council should consider their needs. It was not until Alderman Lee - a woman - listened to their requests, and decided that the women of Ku-ring-gai had gone without for too long, that Council began to listen. After putting up with so much for so long, the Association was extremely pleased to learn that a new complex was going to be ready for use in 1979. Cost to be \$300,000 approximately. They were stunned therefore to find in April 1978, that what they deemed a certainty, might well slip through their fingers because of a few conservationists.

Charlotte Posker was on the Netball executive in 1978 and said when interviewed, "I can't see why the residents objected to the complex. The Canoon Road site was just a scraggly area that had been devastated by fire several

times. It did not even support good vegetation, and the complex when built would make a good fire break for the residents". (Interview, Charlotte Posker, 1. 7. 84). She also shed light on why S.T.E.P. found the netballers difficult to contact. She said, "The Council told the Association they were not to speak with any protestors, they were only to deal with Council". Then added, "I wouldn't have made a fool of myself in front of television cameras as they (the Protestors) did, but the protestors were not silly people, they were well educated academically". (Ibid.)

The television cameras Charlotte refers to were very much in evidence between the dates of 10th and 13th April inclusive. S.T.E.P. had informed all the media of their battle, and Channel Ten in particular, covered it most fully.

IV. THE CONSERVATIONIST

Robin Buchanan is a trained biologist, (B.A. Hons. Macq.Uni) and in 1978 had been jointly responsible for a Plan of Management for Pennant Hills Park. This ^{park} was just across the valley from Canoon Road. Together with Dr. Adamson, a senior lecturer in Biology at Macquarie University, she had published an article on "Exotic Plants in Urban Bushland, in the Sydney Region". Very early in the dispute

Robin came forward and offered her services. S.T.E.F. asked her to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for the Council, when they learnt that one was rightly needed before work could proceed.

In less than two weeks Robin prepared a detailed twenty-two page report complete with maps and photos. This was ignored in favour of the two page statement made by Alderman Kartzoff and the Director of Parks for Ku-ging-gai, even though it had been endorsed by Dr. Adamson. In fact Council chose to never admit to its value until on the 24th May, 1978 the State Pollution Control Commission stated that they acknowledged the fact that Robin was a "trained biologist of good professional status".

(Letter S.P.C.C. 2.6.78)

THE INTERREGNUM

In the 'breathing space' S.T.E.P. knew they had to work fast, and they had to come up with a very good alternative if they wished to preserve their bush. S.T.E.P. started by arranging an interview with Judith Goadby, and went one Saturday to observe a day's play. After this exercise, S.T.E.P. began to wonder what evidence the Netball Association had produced to justify the expenditure of \$300,000. On this routine competition Saturday, the courts at both Mimosa and the Comenarra were often only partially utilized

between 10.30 a.m. and 4 p.m., there was a problem with the parking and referees, but there seemed no need to bulldoze virgin bush to solve this.

The first suggestion of bitumining both the Comenarra and Mimosa courts, building a clubhouse, and improving access to the carpark, was immediately rejected by Council. The Comenarra must never be bitumined, as it would detract from the carefully preserved 'green' along the road.

S.T.E.P. then carefully surveyed the Mimosa site. They discovered that the number of courts there could be increased to eighteen. By bitumining them to facilitate an earlier start, and use the Comenarra only as a back up, most games could be scheduled there, and so spare the referees the trouble of having to travel forward and back. There was room at Mimosa on the northern side for a carpark and clubhouse. The parking area could be connected, by the removal of a small portion of bush, with Kate Street, so provide easy access in and out. It might be annoying for nearby residents, but the Mimosa field had been there a long time, so those who lived there, had probably learned to cope with the situation.

The best alternative it seemed to everyone was to build all the courts on the old East Wahroonga tip site. Many

residents remembered using the tip, and knew that it had been earmarked for sporting activities once it had settled. On looking at the map, S.T.E.P. saw there would be congestion where Westbrook Avenue met Burns Road, but cars could also use Hampden Avenue, or leave Westbrook Avenue at Junction Lane. There was no sole access road as with Canoon Road, and the ovals at Cliff and Westbrook Avenues could use alternative routes to get to their fields, unlike the two ovals in South Turramurra who were forced to use Kissing Point Road.

Greg Bloomfield went and spoke to the Land Board Office about the possibility of using the tip. After a few days negotiation the Land Board freed it for Council use. Concurrently S.T.E.P. polled the residents living near the tip. Most were in favour of the development. One even wrote to Council saying, ... "we would be glad to support such a development ... everyone feels that this site is an appropriate alternative for the Canoon Road Netball complex". (Letter to Council from G. Haiman, 24. 4.78).

When this proposal was put forward by S.T.E.P., Aldermen Lennon and Lee indicated interest. The Council Engineer reported that because of instability only eight courts could be sealed at once, the others could be given an all weather surface later, but in the meantime the rest would have to

be grassed. Greg Bloomfield said later that Judith Goadby was willing to consider the proposal of eight sealed courts only, and the rest in grass, but realised that though Council were pleased to now have the tip site, they had no intention of ever putting the netball courts there. (Interview, Bloomfield).

At all levels the battle raged. Pressure was put upon Council by many, including, the National Trust of Australia, Milo Dunphy of the Total Environment Centre, Jack Munday, and the National Parks Association of N.S.W. The F.E.D. & F.A. black banned the project, and S.T.E.P. fed the local newspapers all information to hand. As Council had ignored the first petition, S.T.E.P. once again letterboxed the area below the Kissing Point lights. Almost 300 letters were collected and 80% were in favour of protecting the bush. This was a high return, as there are only about 480 houses in the area.

Six representatives of S.T.E.P. spoke at two Council Open Forum meetings - three at each. All raised many points. The following are a few. There was only one main access road into the area, and that was often choked on a Saturday, after morning matches on the two ovals in South Turrumurra. Maxwell Street was hazardous to use, as visibility from it was poor, and there was Stop sign at its intersection with

the Comenarra. Cars going to and from matches did not necessarily move up and down Kissing Point Road but turned in all directions. The residents already experienced frustrating waits at the lights so what would it be like with traffic generated from not just two ovals, but a netball complex as well. S.T.E.P. reminded Council that netball was a player intensive game. The twenty-five courts at Canoon Road would use fourteen players and two umpires every sixty minutes. They estimated that there would be approximately 400 car movements per hour. Council replied that they felt there would be only 160. S.T.E.P. as it turned out was right.

Greg Bloomfield addressed Council on the 15th May and spoke of the planned 20% cut in library expenditure. He said "Increasing numbers of residents are asking what is so special about the netballers that they cannot continue to play on their existing twenty-six courts ...". Those who queue a little longer at their library may have the satisfaction of knowing perhaps it is all in a good cause - a better life for netball umpires". (North Shore Times. 17. 5. 78). Council admitted they planned to make cuts in library expenditure. After Greg had spoken, they voted to exclude the public from certain discussions in future. The Council by now was also insisting that the project would only cost \$200,000. However they always forgot to

include the \$86,000 coming from the tennis court fund. Another point they often skimmed over was the fact that the amenities block and clubhouse in log cabin style was going to cost \$100,000! Council, together with the Netball Association said that the complex would "not impose on the environment and residents, or intrude into their enjoyment of the area". (S.T.E.P. Newsletter, No. 4 April, 1979). S.T.E.P. pointed out that this could never be true, there would always be the loss of twelve acres of weed free bush, let alone a traffic problem.

An uneasy quiet settled over South Turramurra. A twenty-four hour vigil was maintained at the site, and two weeks slipped into four with no work being attempted. On 22nd May the Canoon Road complex matter was placed on the Council meeting agenda, for final decision. The chambers were packed. People waited and waited. It was not until 10.50 p.m. that the matter came up. By 11 p.m. it was decided. Canoon Road would go ahead as planned.

THE FINAL HOURS

A resident enquired on the 24th May at 9.10 a.m. if anything was planned for that day. She was told by the Town Clerk that to his knowledge there would be no activity taking place. At 9.30 a.m. a bulldozer appeared, and after trying

all possible entrances returned to the depot. Then at 10 a.m. two senior officers of the State Pollution Control came to the site, escorted by Alderman Lennon and the Town Clerk. The S.P.C.C. discussed the situation sympathetically and intelligently with S.T.E.P. The group then, rightly concluded, that by this action, the Commission had placed the whole issue under Section 4.2.3. of its "Principles and Procedures for Environmental Impact Assessment in N.S.W.". This section reads: - "Where the determining authority is also the developer and the proposal is one which has special significance or has generated significant public controversy, that authority must refer the matter the State Pollution Control Commission for consideration before it proceeds". (S.P.C.C. Booklet on Principles and Procedures for Environmental Impact Assessment in N.S.W.) The S.P.C.C. informed the Council and S.T.E.P. as they left the site, that report would be forthcoming.

This direction was flouted on Monday 29th May, 1978. Down Canoon Road that morning thundered a convoy of four large bulldozers, escorted by police in cars with lights flashing. Some residents attempted to stop the dozers, but one driver shouted out, "We have been told to stop for no one". (Telegraph. 30.5.78. P.3) . Vic Fitzgerald appealed to them to stop, but it turned out the drivers employed were non-union, so he could do nothing.

Air cover was not forgotten, or was it coincidental that a helicopter hovered overhead at that time? A camera crew filmed the whole operation at a cost of \$790. The Town Clerk said it was to protect Council staff from possible rigged charges of assault. (Advocate-Courier, June 7, 1978). It is odd that they filmed cars and protestors at length. Did they wish to record number plates and faces? The Council guarded the site afterwards day and night, using an armed guard and dogs. The armed guard accusation was denied by Council, but why then was he wearing a holster.

Afterwards Alderman Lee said the women were extremely intractable, non-respectors of property and had damaged and burnt bulldozers. They had even pushed their three year olds in front of the bulldozers. She herself had carried in the glove box of her car a permanent authorization to arrest people during that time. (Interview. Lee)

It seems incredible that Council would go to such lengths in order to win. However it was learnt later, that the Council had been tipped off that the decision being considered by the S.P.C. was to go against them. They pre-empted it by going ahead. One Alderman told a S.T.E.P. member later, "We thought you had us". (Interview, E. Petersen).

THE AFTERMATH

Faced with such a resounding defeat S.T.E.P. could have quietly retreated. Instead like the phoenix it resolutely rose up, and then strode forward. The group began by publishing a newsletter. In it they spoke of their basic aim - preservation of the bush - and what they hoped to achieve in the future. To date all has been carried out. It includes the establishment of an umbrella body, to unite all the conservation groups along the Lane Cove Valley; the monitoring of all Council meetings; and working with Council over how the netball courts could be constructed, so as to lessen their impact on the bush.

Council concurred with many points raised. They did not proceed with a back carpark, resited the amenity block-club house, refrained from installing night lights, and provided a locked gate system to prevent vehicular access to the bush. The log cabin club house did not eventuate. Financial and design difficulties caused this constraint. (Letter from Town Clerk. 1.3.79). It was replaced with a building of 'colonial' appearance. (Ibid).

1979

Saturday 31st May, arrived, and the Netball Association hastened eagerly to their new complex. South Turramurra watched apprehensively. Their worst fears were more than realised, a 'monster' had been built. Traffic was horrendous

People nearby could not get out of their driveways - and still cannot at certain times - and the cars come to a standstill at the Kissing Point lights, at the end of each game. Parking was frightful. Access to the carpark was narrow, so many parents just left their cars along Canoon Road, and walked. This completely choked the street. The whole valley could hear the loud speaker system. Over seventy messages were relayed that day, many of which did not refer to the running of the games. (Letter from Kissing Point Progress Association to Nerball Association. 16. 4.79.)

The following Wednesday Alderman Lennon met with S.T.E.P. and agreed that South Turramurra had "had enough". He stated that Council would not fall in with the Netball Association request that more bush be bulldozed to make a bigger carpark, and that the noise must be reduced. (Letter to Kissing Point Progress Association from S.T.E.P. 5. 4. 79).

Today traffic is still the biggest problem, but the noise pollution has been lessened. S.T.E.P. is a continuing force within the community, and has persuaded Council to allow them to hand clear the surrounding bush as a better means of fire prevention, rather than control burning. Groups go into the bush regularly and weed it, using the Bradley method. Bush trails have been constructed and bush walks organised. A Management Plan was published.

The electoral roll of the area collated street by street, and at present maps showing walking trails, are being drawn up for future publication. S.T.E.P. has recently applied to the Community Employment Programme for a grant to help restore the pocket of rainforest at nearby Brown's Field.

During this confrontation, dissenting residents often found that they were barred from participation in decisions concerning them. Councillors ignored their opinions, and disregarded the two polls they ran. As a hastily formed group they never possessed power, prestige, and resources. They only really became recognised as a force to be reckoned with when the next election came round.

S.T.E.P. found that Councils have enormous powers. When the State or Federal Government passes a statute, it has to abide by that statute, until such a time as that statute is altered. Courts are there to ensure that this happens. Local Governments can ignore their own resolutions, and no one can interfere. Ku-ring-gai Council ignored Resolution Number 1362 and residents were powerless to prevent this. It is only S.T.E.P. realises, by continuous monitoring of Council, and ensuring members elected will not become remote from their constituents, that a form of control can be exercised over future Council decisions concerning the environment.

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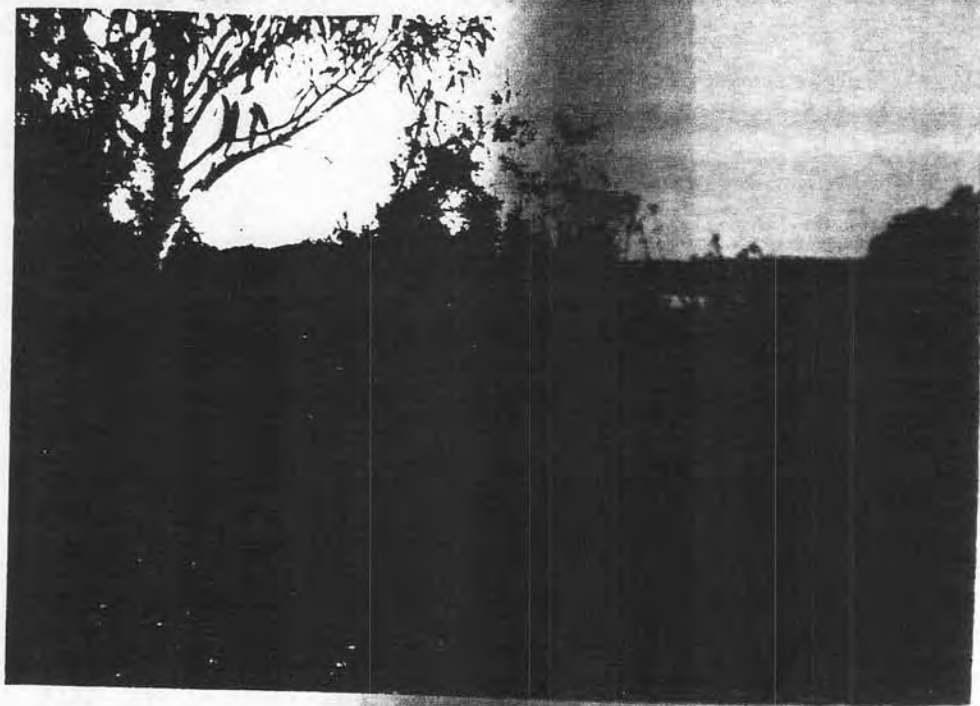
-No.3. (June, 1978).

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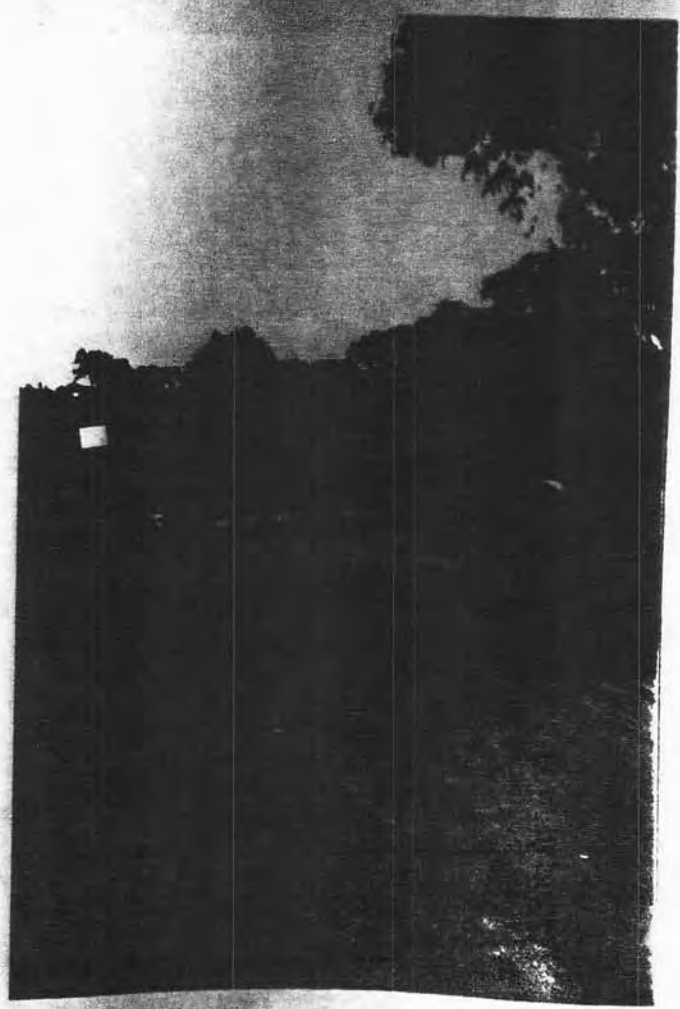
State Pollution Control Commission Booklet on,
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Oral Interviews with;-

| | |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| Bloomfield, Greg. | 1.7.84. (Personal) |
| Buchanan, Robin. | 2.7.84. (Telephone) |
| Catford, Janet. | 5.7.84. (Personal) |
| Fitzgerald, Julie. | 1.7.84. (Telephone) |
| Langshaw, Yvonne. | 28.4.84. (Personal) |
| Lee, Yolanda. | 1.7.84. (Telephone) |
| Lennon, John. | 12.7.84. (Telephone) |
| Petersen, Helen, | 30.6.84. (Personal) |
| Posker, Charlotte. | 1.7.84. (Telephone) |



if the area had been left untouched, this is what it would be like today (1984). Clubhouse roof can be seen in the distance.



The Narrow Entrance into the Complex.

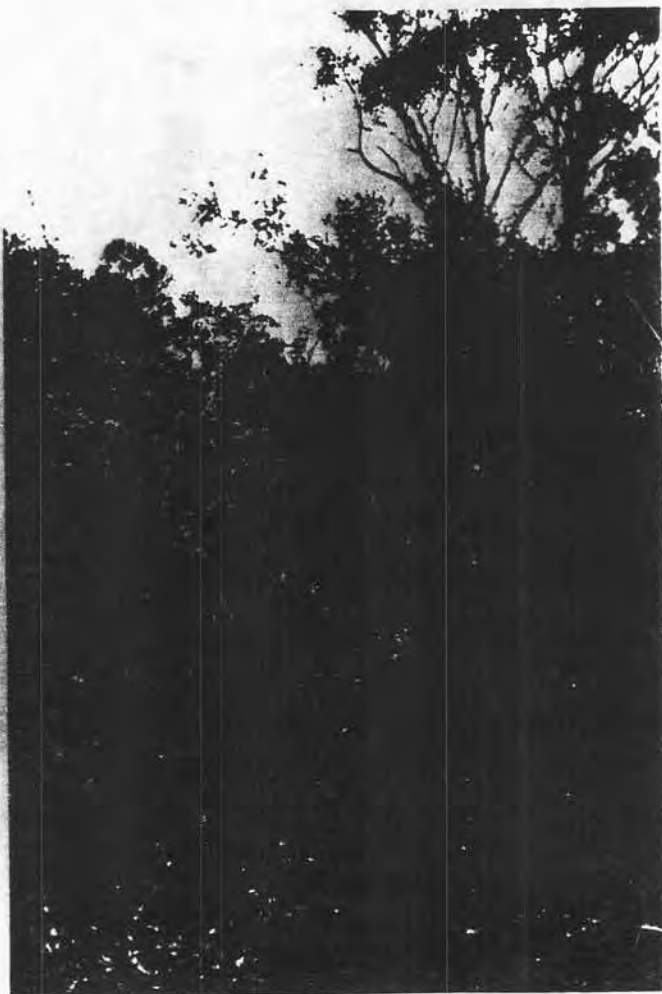


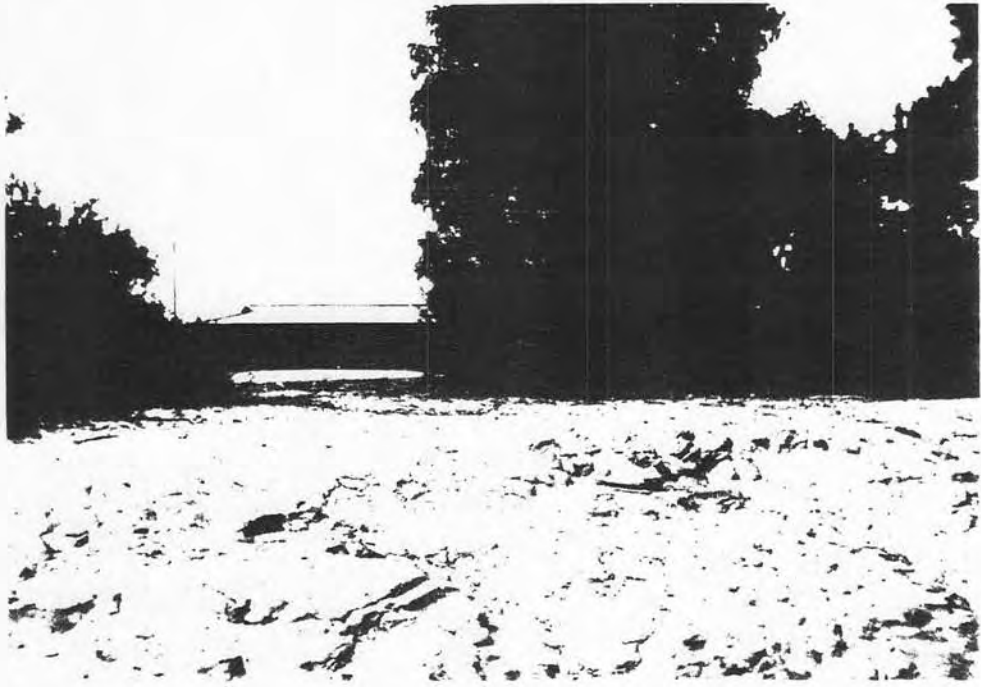
The
"Depauperated
Burnt-out Parody"
Today, (1984-August)

"The Scraggly Area"

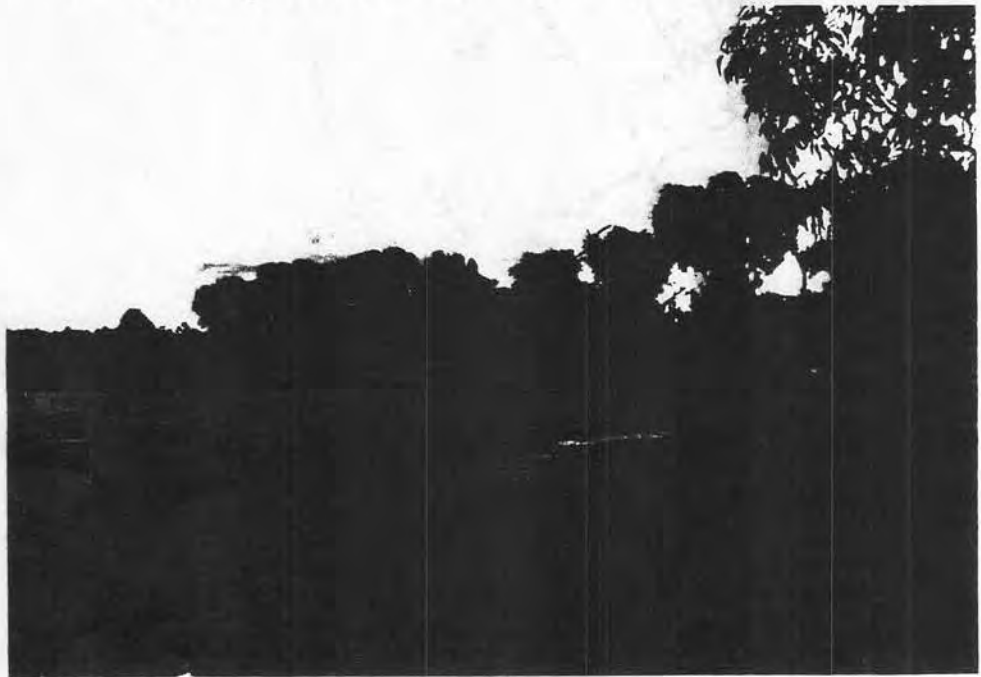
that did not
support much
vegetation.

It is rejuvenating
nicely now - though
now could S.T.E.P.
convince people
otherwise. (August, 1989)

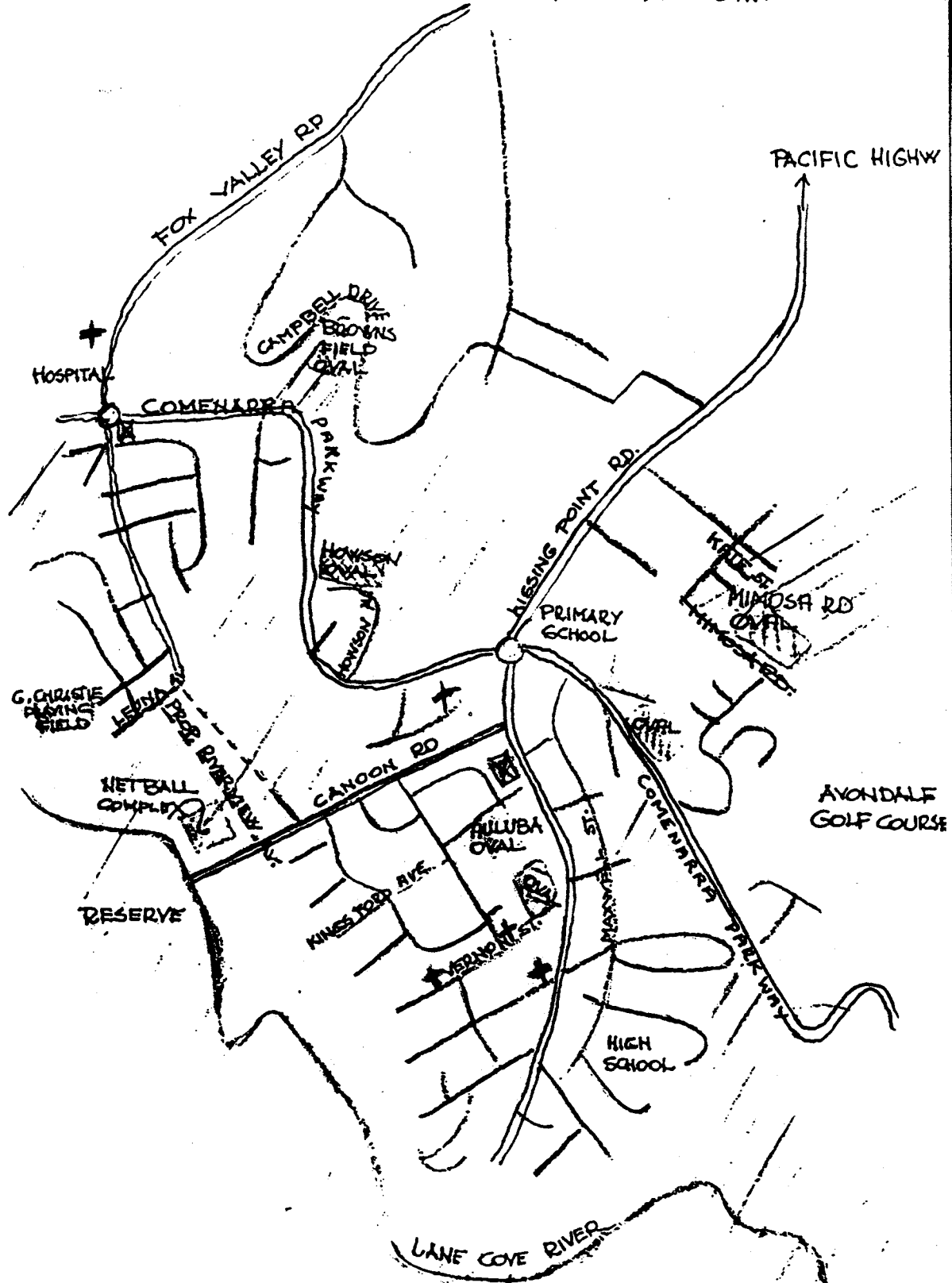




Both pictures illustrate how the 'nature strips' advocated by Alderman Lee have become eroded beyond repair. Soon all the natural vegetation will die, due to hundreds tramping it to death. 'Colonial style' club house in background of top picture.



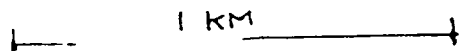
→ PACIFIC HIGHW.



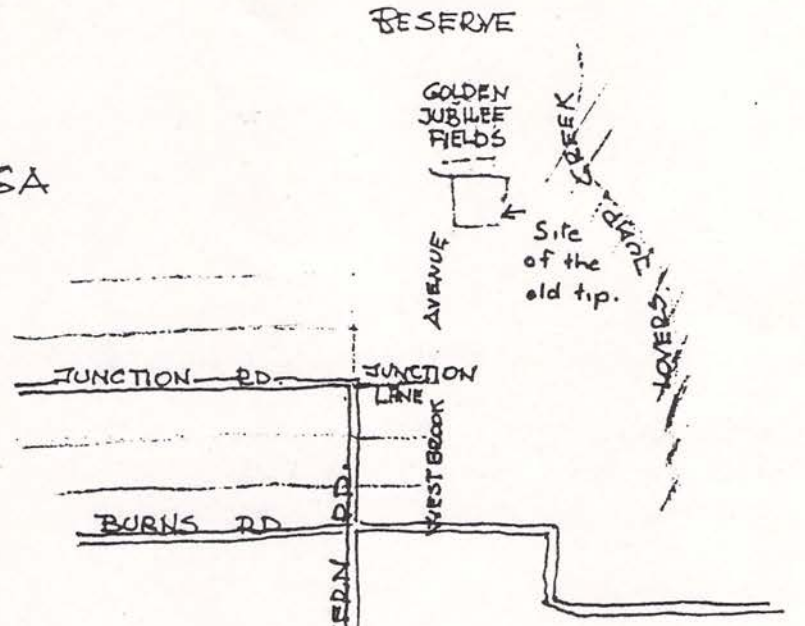
- TRAFFIC LIGHTS
- + CHURCH
- SHOPPING CENTRE
- OVAL
- RESERVE

MAP OF SOUTH TURRAMURRA

SCALE APPROX.



NORTH WAHROONGA



MAP OF WAHROONGA EAST

