

# STEP forth boldly

STEP Inc from birth to 40

Graeme Aplin



**STEP Inc**

Community-based Environmental Conservation since 1978

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Front cover: Trees and Rocks of the Sandstone (acrylic, April2018) by Yvonne Langshaw ([www.yvonnelangshaw.com](http://www.yvonnelangshaw.com))

STEP was born from a local controversy, the construction of the Canoon Road netball complex at the expense of valuable bushland. But STEP's history should also be seen in the broader context of the 1970s environmental movements, such as the Gordon-below-Franklin campaign and the formation of the Greens Party. Closer to home, from 1970–83 the Battlers for Kelly's Bush fought to retain an area of bushland in Hunters Hill, which provided a precedent for Green Bans.

STEP has not won all its battles — not its initial one, for a start — but it has won or helped to win many, and ameliorated the effects of many others. It has changed the nature of the interaction between the district population and its natural environment, spreading its focus and influence far beyond its very local beginnings in South Turramurra and the adjacent section of the Lane Cove Valley. All local people there and in its later wider sphere of influence have benefited from STEP's efforts as their natural environment and its protection have been improved.

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

I am always being asked what STEP stands for. I have to point out that the name comes from the acronym of South Turramurra Environment Protection but we now work for so much more than the conservation of bushland in that small suburb.

Nevertheless those heady early days were a great beginning for an organisation that went on to make its mark on the character of Turramurra and nearby suburbs. The actions of STEP members created awareness of the value of the fantastic bushland and wildlife in our region and the steps required to care for, and enhance, this asset that had been allowed to become weed infested and degraded. What other major city has such magnificent natural areas within its suburbs?

STEP members initiated many activities but also worked with other people and organisations to improve our environment or limit actions that would be detrimental. These relationships have become increasingly important in recent years and will be even more so in the future as the forces working against the preservation of the environment become more pervasive.

We hope you enjoy this reminiscence of the people and events over the past 40 years.



**Jill Green, President**

## FOREWORD

So much of our history fades away, unrecorded and soon forgotten. Some things, however, deserve a better fate and so it is with the 40 year STEP story.

Many people appreciate our natural environment, they like to know that bushland is there to be enjoyed and appreciated. They are enthusiastic about Australia's unique animals and plants. Most people, however, don't realise that it all is continually under threat. Under threat from the unthinking and the greedy who would happily degrade our environment to further their other objectives. So it has happened that we have lost a lot by means of a lengthy series of small decisions and this is still happening. As a result bushland has been lost, fragmented and degraded, many river systems are in crisis, unforgiveable plant and animal extinctions have occurred and our oceans are polluted as well as rising.

Only a few people decide that they must do something to make things better. They range from those who are prepared to take the sort of direct action that often sees them in jail to those who demonstrate on the streets and to those who join together to argue and lobby for a better world. Environmental groups here range from the national ACF to more local groups such as STEP.

Graeme Aplin has done us a great service by writing this STEP history. He has told of 40 years of constant effort by a small group of committee members dedicated to making a difference, and of course of all those STEP members who have supported them. It is, however, impossible to mention all the work that has been done. The hundreds, if not thousands of letters, reports, responses to calls for public comment, meetings with relevant parties, attendance at external meetings, phone calls and all the other activities necessary to do the job. Then there have been the monthly committee meetings, the writing of newsletters, the keeping of accounts, the sales of STEP's publications, the design and maintenance of the web site and the myriad things essential to run an organisation.

As Graeme points out, STEP has made a difference, both in major and minor ways. Bushland has been saved, minds have been changed, road plans have been amended and management methods for the environment have been improved, and much more.

There remains, however, a huge task ahead. Australia is threatened by rampant exponential growth, by global warming, by plans to dam more rivers and clear more native forests, by over extraction of groundwater, inappropriate mines and more. Population pressures mean that bushland will be cleared for playing fields, roads and other facilities. So STEP's work will never be finished. Whether there will be enough people willing to continue that work, in the face of a society that is largely busy on the one hand and complacent on the other, remains to be seen.

As Lester Brown famously said, 'saving civilisation is not a spectator sport'. Indeed it isn't and perhaps Graeme Aplin's history will remind us all of that, so that enough people will come forward to carry on STEP's work for another 40 years.



**John Burke, former president**

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## PREFACE

In April 2018, STEP reached its 40th anniversary, a milestone well worth celebrating. This short history is part of the anniversary celebration and a tribute to all those involved in STEP's highly successful life, including the multitudes not mentioned by name. It is also an occasion on which to look back and feel proud of the past, as well as to look forward to an undoubtedly busy and rewarding, if sometimes frustrating, future.

This book is in broadly chronological order and is chiefly based on the newsletters and president's reports on STEP's website. Elizabeth Dokulil's work *Out of STEP* was valuable in filling out the events of the first two formative years when STEP was created to fight the loss of valuable bushland in Canoon Road for construction of a netball courts complex (see p 3). Interviews with a number of key players in the STEP story (see below) added more personal touches, and undoubtedly corrected some of the inevitable errors in the draft document. All remaining errors are my responsibility.

It will be readily apparent to the reader that the early years when the interests and activities of STEP were being established are given more detailed attention than later times. However, it will be pointed out over and over again that most of these interests and activities have continued throughout STEP's history. Some examples are bush regeneration, fire hazard reduction, bushwalks, and involvement in related organisations. In later years there is much to write about as STEP's range of activities and its geographical coverage expanded into areas like publishing, mapping, lobbying, writing submissions and producing position papers.

I think it is worthwhile for the reader to bear in mind that it has been a small group of people who have undertaken all the activities discussed. The quality of those dedicated members has been outstanding and what that group, changing and evolving over time, has achieved is truly remarkable. If some of these core people and their contributions have not been specifically mentioned, I apologise for the omissions.

I am indebted to many people. First and foremost are STEP's current president and secretary, Jill Green and Helen Wortham, respectively. They were essentially the people who first conveyed the commission to me, then gave me much assistance and encouragement as the task progressed. They were also the ones who arranged the production of the final publication.

I also wish to thank all those who gave of their time to discuss their personal involvement as well as broader aspects of STEP's activities: John Booth, Margaret Booth, Robin Buchanan, John Burke, Janet Catford, Bruno Krockenberger, Yvonne Langshaw, Michelle Leishman, John Martyn, Andrew Ruys and Robin Ruys. Robin Buchanan, Bruno Krockenberger and especially John Burke also looked through an early draft and gave helpful advice leading to improvements, as did Jill and Helen. Jill and Helen worked on the final draft, Helen being particularly active in this respect. Barry Tomkinson, John Martyn and John Burke also commented on the final draft.

Finally, I wish to thank my wife, Carolyn, who has been of practical assistance as well as offering encouragement throughout the project. Even though I have enjoyed the experience and found it well worth doing, I did need that encouragement at times.

**Graeme Aplin**





## INTRODUCTION

STEP Inc (as it is now) was originally South Turramurra Environment Protection (STEP). STEP later became incorporated, and because by then its concerns and membership had extended well beyond South Turramurra, STEP was no longer considered an acronym, although habits die hard (see pp 3 and 12). For convenience, the group will be referred to simply as STEP.

For the last 40 years, STEP has worked hard to generate a greater appreciation and understanding of the natural environment, and to protect that environment. A very good introduction to STEP is given on its excellent website, [www.step.org.au](http://www.step.org.au):

In 1978, an area of bushland in South Turramurra was threatened with destruction by plans to build a netball complex. Residents were galvanised into action to try to save this natural area and so STEP was formed. That particular fight was lost, but from this small beginning STEP has grown to become a vital force in conservation in northern Sydney.

STEP questions the conventional wisdom. Urban environmentalism is much more than fighting against loss of natural areas. It is essential to look many decades ahead and to educate and inspire the community to appreciate what we have if the battle against the unthinking and destroyers is to be won. Natural areas may be maintained by regeneration and maintenance but they can only be saved if they are not lost, piece by piece, to our ever increasing need for housing, schools, roads, playing fields, hospitals and all other developments our governments are imposing upon us.

By joining STEP you will demonstrate that you are concerned about retaining the local environment for the future. We draw our members from far and wide but we are primarily concerned with Ku-ring-gai, Hornsby and surrounding suburbs. Each year we organise walks and talks, produce newsletters, make submissions to government and award prizes and grants to students to support environmental education.

We've published position papers, books and maps of walking tracks.

Its aims and objectives are given as:

- to work for the conservation of bushland in northern Sydney;
- to ensure proper management of this bushland;
- to promote participation of members through walks, talks and other activities;
- to promote environmental education by:
  - publishing newsletters, books, maps, position papers and information material;
  - conducting meetings, public lectures, conferences, seminars and debates;
  - providing grants to support research;
  - writing submissions and lobbying people in public office;
- to exchange information with, and support, other environmental groups; and
- to provide representation on environmental committees, proceedings and inquiries.

Its achievements are listed as:

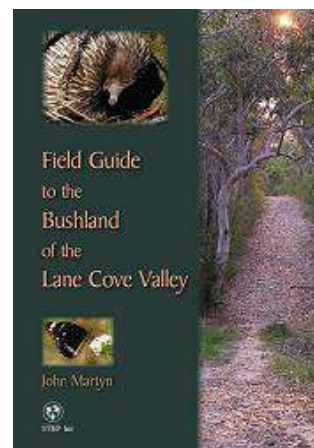
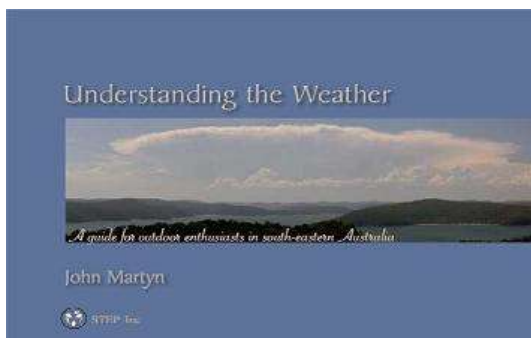
- a key player in the formation and functioning of Ku-ring-gai Council's Bushland Management Working Party in the early 1980s – this led to the first local government bushland plan of management and transformed the way our bushland is appreciated and managed (see p 8);
- campaign against freeways through the Lane Cove Valley, including the protection of bushland along the B2/B3 road reservation (see p 14);
- protection of, and adequate funding for, the bushland within Lane Cove National Park is ongoing and has had mixed success (see p 18);
- preventing destruction of bushland in a proposal to greatly alter the alignment of Arterial Road north of Koola Avenue, Killara, by proposing an economical and effective alternative (see p 16);
- reduction of sediment, litter, nutrients and the velocity of stormwater entering the Fox Valley section of Lane Cove National Park, made possible by the acquisition of an EPA Stormwater Grant (see p 24);

- influencing many environmental decisions through membership of committees such as the NPWS Advisory Committee, the Lane Cove Valley Catchment Committee and the UTS Lindfield Committee;
- involved with the formation of the Blue Gum High Forest Group to preserve the Blue Gum High Forest in St Ives for perpetuity (see p 23);
- protection of bushland at the University of Technology Sydney (Ku-ring-gai Campus) (see p 18);
- protection of bushland at the Sydney Adventist Hospital site (see p 31);
- development of a method of selective hand clearing for bushfire hazard reduction (see p 8);
- implementation of modern bushland management techniques in the field until they became generally accepted (see p 8);
- achieving the respect of the community and government departments generally so that STEP is often asked for input on issues and is able to influence decisions for the benefit of the environment;
- environmental education by giving grants to university students and schools, and by supporting the Young Scientist Awards and the Threatened Species Children's Art Competition (see p 27);
- publication of books (see pp 20, 25, 38):
  - *Rocks and Trees* (2018);
  - *Understanding the Weather: A Guide for Outdoor Enthusiasts in South-eastern Australia* (2013);
  - *Field Guide to the Lane Cove Valley Bushland* (2010);
  - *Sydney's Natural World* (2007);
  - *Field Guide to the Bushland of the Upper Lane Cove Valley* (1994, out of print);

- publication of maps of walking tracks (see pp 19, 25, 38):
  - Middle Harbour (North) (2004, revised and reprinted 2009);
  - Middle Harbour (South) (2004);
  - Lane Cove Valley (2000, revised and reprinted 2016);
  - Upper Lane Cove Valley (1990, out of print);
- publication of position papers and submissions to government.

Whilst some achievements, such as those listed above, are obvious, it is easy to overlook the hundreds of detailed submissions STEP has made on a wide variety of topics, and to a variety of bodies, including all levels of government. These have taken huge amounts of time and expertise and have often had considerable effect on outcomes. It is hoped that this history gives at least a hint of this less apparent activity. I hope that this history will show that STEP has skilfully and determinedly; worked towards achieving its aims and objectives, and that it has been successful in doing so.

STEP has never been a large organisation, probably never reaching a membership of 500, although totals in the 400s are frequently recorded in the newsletters. However, these numbers are all the same impressive for a local group. Indeed over the years STEP has proved to be one of the most enduring environmental groups on the Upper North Shore, for example it absorbed the West Pymble Bushland Society in 1987 ([president's report 1987](#), p 3), the Ku-ring-gai Bushland and Environment Society in 1999 (see p 22) and the Thornleigh Area Bushland Society in 2007 (see p 23).





## CHAPTER 1: BIRTH AND FIRST BATTLE, 1978

STEP was originally the South Turramurra Natural Bushland Conservation Society, formed in 1971 to fight Ku-ring-gai Council's plans for a garbage tip in the Lane Cove Valley between Canoon Road and Cove Street. This proposal was defeated, but in 1978 council pressed for a complex of netball courts in high quality bushland at the end of Canoon Road. Residents were galvanised into action, and the South Turramurra Natural Bushland Conservation Society assembled to form South Turramurra Environment Protection (STEP).

### First battle

STEP arose out of a perceived emergency. Word had circulated that Ku-ring-gai Council was proposing to allow and actively support the building of a large netball courts complex with associated parking, clubhouse and other amenities on virgin bushland at the end of Canoon Road, South Turramurra, taking up perhaps 12 acres (4.86 hectares). There had been a lack of community consultation and no environmental impact statement (EIS) had been prepared, both requirements that could justifiably be expected to have been met. Residents of South Turramurra became aware of the proposed development when a whisper of it reached the ears of Greg Bloomfield, who passed the news on to John Booth.

This battle is given more space in this 40th anniversary history than the reader might think warranted, but it is important as it provides the context of STEP's birth.

Some kind of deal appeared to have been done between council and the Netball Association: the then current competition site on the Comenarra Parkway a short distance away was certainly problematic because of parking difficulties on such a busy through road. At the same time, though, any Canoon Road complex with perhaps 25 courts was likely to be used for only one or two days per week, for perhaps 12 weeks each year.

Furthermore, and decidedly on the negative side, the development would mean the loss of a crucial bushland resource, one seen as an essential part of local life by the many South Turramurra residents who valued bushwalking, other forms of active or passive recreation, and the preservation of native flora and fauna. The bushland along the Upper Lane Cove River and its

tributaries was a crucial part of the particular, and in some ways unique, ambience of South Turramurra and adjacent suburban areas.

In addition, this was an example of the loss of natural areas by the accumulation of small decisions that, if allowed to continue would fragment and degrade our bushland.

STEP in part evolved from an earlier environmental body, the South Turramurra Natural Bushland Conservation Society, formed in 1971 to fight Ku-ring-gai Council's plans for a garbage tip in the Lane Cove Valley between Canoon Road and Cove Street ([www.step.org.au/about](http://www.step.org.au/about)). The tip proposal was ultimately defeated, but council's interests in the area shifted to community halls, sports ovals and, as we have seen, netball courts. The society lapsed after the tip proposal was defeated.

Several years later, STEP was formed at a community meeting of concerned local citizens on the night of 12 April 1978 ([chair's report to the first annual general meeting](#), 14 June 1979). However, earlier than this, a group of concerned local residents had been meeting in Marlene Darragh's house.

### Initial aims

STEP's [first newsletter](#) (1978) gives STEP's three aims as follows (underlining in the original):

- to preserve this bushland area for passive recreation for the Ku-ring-gai community as a whole;
- to have the whole of the Lane Cove River Valley from source to mouth preserved as a unique park at a time when city bushland is fast disappearing; and
- to look for alternative sites for the netball complex as all community groups deserve equal consideration.

It is clear from the third aim that STEP was not opposed to the netball courts as such and saw a need for such a development, but objected to the proposed location in Canoon Road. In fact they suggested an alternative site, as we will see below. The second aim alludes to a wider concern that definitely became a key part of STEP's activities virtually from the organisation's formation. This aim was in large part met with the creation of Lane Cove National Park in later years.

As later chapters show, the aims of STEP became broader and more clearly articulated as time passed. However, the intent of the first two aims above has been retained and elaborated upon and the gains safeguarded. The third aim became largely irrelevant after the Canoon Road netball courts were built despite the protests of STEP and others, though STEP continued to hope that the courts might be removed and relocated elsewhere and resisted further development and extensions in subsequent years, as discussed in later chapters.

STEP quickly received support from a wide range of organisations for its first two aims and for its opposition to the netball courts as proposed. The National Trust recommended a single Lane Cove Regional Park, including the proposed netball site. Support also came from the National Parks Association of NSW, the Nature Conservation Council, the Total Environment Centre, Ecology Action, the NSW Field Ornithologists Club, and the Orienteering Association of NSW (Newsletter 2, May 1978).

Many academics in relevant fields also supported STEP's actions, particularly those at Macquarie University, just across the Lane Cove River from South Turramurra. Dr Don Adamson of Macquarie University prepared a brief environmental impact report that essentially supported the STEP stance. In addition, some 300 letters were written, 80% in favour of retaining the bushland, but the two ward aldermen on Kuring-gai Council made no effort to bring those letters to the attention of council at its meetings.

Robin Buchanan, a trained ecologist and botanist, also prepared a more detailed EIS to be tendered to council. She had earlier been a joint author of a *Plan of Management for Pennant Hills Park*, a

nearby section of the Lane Cove Valley. Peter Myerscough, who had recently addressed a STEP meeting on the topic of the management and future of urban bushland, assisted Robin, as did Don Adamson and a sub-committee of STEP (Newsletter 3, June 1978).

Robin's report was ignored by council; however, the council accepted a contrary submission by one of its councillors. One STEP representative remembers being questioned by Alderman Kartzoff in a 'bullying Stalinist' manner.

The first two newsletters, quoted from above, were amateurish productions, not surprising given the haste with which STEP was formed and its necessarily practical, action-based focus. Newsletter 3 (June 1978) was more professionally produced. It pointed out that council seemed to have flouted its own regulations in the netball courts context, and specifically to have ignored the State Pollution Control Commission's requirement for an EIS to be produced in such a situation. Regardless of any procedural shortcomings, 29 May 1978 saw a 'formidable convoy move in, complete with armed security and camera crew'. Newsletter 4 (April 1979) acknowledges the destruction of the Canoon Road bushland in May and June 1978.

### A battle hard fought, but lost

A more detailed account of the netball courts battle than can be given here is contained in Elizabeth Dokulil's work entitled *Out of STEP: An Account of South Turramurra's Opposition to the Kuring-gai Council's Proposal of Building a Major Netball Complex in the Area in 1978* (Dokulil 1984). Much of the following section is adapted from that source.

On 4 April 1978, three housewives (now an outdated designation, perhaps, but used in STEP material of the time), Janet Catford, Chris Woodhouse and Margaret Booth, confronted council bulldozers for the first time. They stood in front of the machines and the drivers eventually gave up and left the site, but only after causing some damage. On 11 April four small D9 bulldozers moved in to be met by about 60 angry women, including Robin Ruys, Margaret Booth, and probably Helen Petersen and Marlene Darragh. Then at 5.15 am the next morning Jan

Ruys rang Greg Bloomfield to say that a large bulldozer had arrived at the end of Canoon Road, having awoken his wife, Robin. That day and the subsequent two months or so remain vivid in Robin Ruys' memory (interview 28 February 2018).

Greg Bloomfield became STEP's first president, but stood down before the first year was out. Les Csenderits took over as president and in his annual report of June 1979 he states:

It was not without some fear and trepidation that I unhesitatingly dispatched my wife to the scene of action to man the barricades with Jan. This prompt action on my part once again saved the day (and the bush) for the time being, and gave us another short-lived respite.

Sandra Csenderits had taken over as secretary in that first year and the couple continued to play important roles in STEP for many years to come.

A determined council eventually successfully (from their point of view) bulldozed the site and proceeded with the netball developments. This operation included several bulldozers running for extensive periods, a film crew to record protest activity and, probably, to intimidate those protesting, and armed guards with a guard dog. The guards and dog would be argued to be protecting the work site, but were undoubtedly another form of intimidation.

As already suggested, council did not follow its own regulations or the requirements of state bodies. Dokulil (1984, p 10) quotes a resolution documented in the council minutes of 7 April 1975 (p 15) that stated that an EIS is specifically required for projects which:

- have unique natural ... features on either public or private lands; and/or
- it may deem to have an adverse effect on the environment.

In such cases an environmental report is required from an independent registered consultant and council should:

... not give any consideration to any development likely to have an impact on the environment which is not accompanied by an EIS.

Surely the Canoon Road netball complex proposal demanded an EIS. It thus seems in retrospect that Ku-ring-gai Council — both councillors and staff — had made up their minds that the netball courts should go ahead without one. The desires and lobbying of netballers were clearly outweighing those of people concerned about loss of valuable bushland and due process being followed.

The two councillors from the ward that included South Turramurra, by chance the mayor and deputy mayor, Richard Lennon and Yolanda Lee, were similarly biased, much to the disappointment of STEP members. Some people suspect there were reasons for this strong bias and saw a decidedly unsavoury background to council's deliberations. Meetings with those aldermen and other council representatives seemed to bear little fruit, even though STEP members, including Robin Ruys, also attended and spoke at many council meetings.

A number of local community meetings endorsed STEP's stance and petitions were sent to council. One motion opposing the netball courts was passed at a community meeting held on 8 April 1978, and a report was sent to the town clerk (Dokulil 1984, p 11). Neither he nor any of the aldermen thought to mention it at the council meeting of 10 April. Two petitions were tabled at that council meeting, one from the Netball Association and one from residents of South Turramurra. 'There was no debate and in about two minutes council decided to continue the project', a clear example of minds having been made up in advance. Apart from anything else, the mayor for one weighed up the needs of 2000 women netball players against the 'selfish' desires of a 'small number' of residents. And, then, as we saw previously, bulldozers just happened to appear at the Canoon Road site the next morning.

Even before STEP was formally established on the night of 12 April 1978, anyone who might help the cause was being contacted. These included the local state member, the minister for local government, and officials of the Federated Engine Driver and Fire Fighters' Union that represented the bulldozer drivers.

At a meeting in the mayor's office on 12 April, the three STEP representatives were grilled at length and it was only when the union official left that Alderman Lennon (the mayor) recommended a two-week cooling-off period, most likely because of concern over the union's possible actions. Subsequent drivers were non-unionists. It is possible that the influence of Jack Munday and the Kelly's Bush controversy played a part in this change to non-union labour. Alderman Lennon suggested the fortnight be spent looking for alternative sites for the netball courts and the Netball Association representative offered to help. 'All the Association wanted was to obtain twenty-five new courts' (*Advocate Courier* 19 April 1978, p 5). Through Greg Bloomfield's efforts, the release of the Westbrook tip site was obtained, but council thought it inappropriate. STEP also investigated the Mimosa Road site, as alluded to below.

Yet another twist was provided by the competition between soccer and netball for playing space, and perhaps also rugby and tennis. The Ku-ring-gai Soccer Association wanted to build a large complex on the old West Pymble quarry site, which ultimately became Bicentennial Park and now has only limited sports fields. Even if their plans had gone ahead, the Soccer Association saw a need for other nearby facilities for big competition periods, and very briefly Canoon Road seemed to be being suggested.

Council finally gave the Netball Association land for 12 courts on a soccer field at Mimosa Road and 14 on the Comenarra Parkway. The latter were, as we have seen, later deemed unsuitable due to parking issues, and the two sites were 2 km apart, an unsatisfactory situation when large competitions were undertaken. The Mimosa Road site was also seen to be unsuitable for the 25 netball courts desired, although STEP had seen the possibility of increasing the number of courts at Mimosa Road to 18 and sealing them to give all-weather playing conditions.

Another aspect worth considering is the effect this saga had on the younger generations. When I spoke with Robin Ruys, she told me that her son Andrew would also like to talk to me. I rang Andrew and he told me how deeply upset he had

been at the loss of the bushland that he would walk, ride a bike and play in as a 13-year-old. He also saw the effect the stress was having on his parents. In addition, his sister, then seven years old, was equally upset. Kate had always had a love for the bushland and is now in adult life an environmental scientist and environmental activist. I do not know if her path in life is directly due to her early experience in Canoon Road, but there is every possibility there is a connection. One positive outcome may well be an awakening of environmental concern in district youngsters, something STEP has followed up on in a number of ways, as discussed in later chapters. The daughter of another early STEP activist was refused permission to play in a netball team.

### Not an end, a beginning

This defeat was far from the end of STEP's involvement with the Canoon Road netball courts (see pp 7, 17, 37). What is more, STEP became broader in its outlook and developed in many directions.

Alan and Janet Catford, and even more so Margaret Booth and Helen Petersen, continued to play important roles in STEP, as did others present at the organisation's birth. Helen became president in 1979 until 1982 and then remained on the committee until 1988. She was instrumental in setting STEP on a course that resulted in STEP having growing influence. Alan Catford and then Yvonne Langshaw followed her as effective presidents in those formative years.

**Last-ditch fight against bulldozer**  
**Councils reel as wives get more militant**  
**Residents call for 'give and take'**  
**NETBALL BUSH ROW**  
**NETBALL COURTS PROCEED**  
**Group fight to save bushland**  
**HOUSEWIVES VS BULLDOZERS**  
**Mayor advises cooling off period**  
**Last-ditch bid by women fails**  
**Reserve is 'best site' for netball complex**

Some newspaper headings from 1978

## CHAPTER 2: EXPANDING HORIZONS, 1979–85

STEP may have lost its first, founding battle, but it was girding its corporate loins for many more in an ongoing campaign to protect the environment, both in the Lane Cove Valley and further afield. STEP increased ties with other conservation groups, and was proactive in educating the public and councils about the importance of bushland management. STEP was establishing itself as an important player in the emerging conservation movement, and to this end chose a eucalypt design by Yvonne Langshaw as its corporate logo.

### Netball courts

STEP's expanding interests did not mean that the netball courts were forgotten or simply accepted in whatever form they took. STEP worked with Ku-ring-gai Council over how the netball courts could be constructed to minimise their unfortunate drastic impact on the bushland at the end of Canoon Road. Much success was achieved. Council did not proceed with construction of a back carpark, they re-sited the amenities block, refrained from installing night lights and installed a locked gate system to prevent vehicular access to the bush, except for management and fire emergency purposes (Dokulil 1984, p 32). The complex also did without the proposed log cabin club house, although this was because of financial and design difficulties: a 'colonial' building replaced it. However, 12.5 acres (just under 5 hectares) of weed-free bushland had been lost and traffic problems were severe.

At some stage in the 1980s, a serious attempt was made to have the Queenwood Quarry on Mona Vale Road developed for a large netball complex, with STEP, netball and council representatives visiting the site. However, it was just over the border in Warringah Shire and cooperation between the two councils could not be achieved. In addition, the quarrying lease on half of the site was renewed for another 15 years. Nothing came of this proposal.

### Bushland management

#### Weed control

The other activities most closely related to STEP's foundation involved active work to care for the remaining bushland on the eastern side of the Lane Cove River and adjacent to South Turramurra. This area of concern soon extended to include the area adjacent to West Pymble, and

later covered an even larger area. The two key forms of involvement were weed control and fire control, though the two were intimately related as shown below.

The weed control, by work parties, employed the Bradley method. In the 1960s and 1970s Joan and Eileen Bradley developed a series of weed control and native vegetation recovery techniques through trial and error. Their work was the beginning of bush regeneration in NSW. The Bradley method involved methodically clearing small areas in and around healthy native vegetation so that each area was re-colonised by the regeneration of native plants, replacing the weeds.

STEP representatives attended a symposium on weeds in urban bushland that endorsed the Bradley method of bush regeneration, already used by the National Trust and many other bodies. Helen Petersen and Robin Buchanan were key figures in this aspect of STEP's activities in its early years.

Groups of volunteers removed invasive weed species by labour-intensive hand weeding, a slow technique, but one that best preserves the native vegetation. Areas covered gradually moved further out from the initial focus in South Turramurra.

One reason for weeds being in the bushland was the dumping of garden refuse and lawn clippings over the fences of adjoining properties: STEP attempted to publicise the ill-effects of this illegal practice. Another factor was the greatly increased runoff from properties situated above bushland, the water being derived from the additional hard surfaces present and from enthusiastic watering of suburban gardens. Each of those water flows is heavy in nutrients: Hawkesbury Sandstone bushland is ill-adapted to the excess water and nutrients, but both are beloved by weeds.

Hazard reduction by hand clearing

Newsletter 6 (1980) expressed concern at the effects of the pre-Christmas (1979) bushfires in the South Turrumurra area, especially as some sections had also been burnt in 1976, thus giving vegetation insufficient time to fully recover. STEP members felt that the standard approach to fire prevention, that of controlled or hazard reduction burns, was misguided. They favoured hand clearing of fuel build-up in a buffer zone adjacent to private property or public infrastructure as an alternative means of hazard reduction.

STEP work parties spent countless hours putting their approach into practice, first in South Turrumurra and later in West Pymble and elsewhere. Janet and Alan Catford were instrumental in establishing this program.

Ku-ring-gai Council accepted this alternative approach as a replacement for hazard reduction burns in those areas treated by STEP, and other councils and local environment groups expressed interest in following suit. Some did.

Bushland management

STEP's Plan of Management for South Turrumurra Bushland was published in time for the June 1980 Annual General Meeting (AGM) and was well received: 600 copies had been sold by the time of the June 1981 AGM. It was prepared by Robin Buchanan, with advice from Peter Myerscough and of course the STEP committee led by president, Helen Petersen. The Management Plan was reprinted in 1984 after 800 copies had been sold. This was a very important and professionally executed project that assisted in establishing STEP's reputation as a solid, reliable and expert organisation.

STEP took part in an October 1980 symposium on management of urban bushland, sponsored by council. The broader (at this time) Ku-ring-gai Bushland and Environmental Society (KUBES) was formally constituted as one outcome, and the society thanked STEP for its help during the formative period. The society was convened by noted local activist, Janet Fairlie-Cuninghame. Willoughby Council held an *Urban Bushland Management Symposium* in March 1983 at which

Helen spoke on *Fire Hazard Reduction by Selective Hand Clearing*.

After effective lobbying by STEP and KUBES, Ku-ring-gai Council formed the Bushland Management Working Party, an advisory committee to council. Helen Petersen (STEP president) and John Burke were on the committee, Helen as the only permitted STEP representative and John as a community member, when it first met in May 1981.

An overview of the history of the committee (STEP Matters 141, September 2007) gives an insight into the early days of the committee:

This was at the start of modern bushland management in Australia but the mainstream didn't really understand. The Bradley Method was a key buzz-word and the effect of nutrients was a new concept. The then manager of the Parks Department saw us, with good reason, as a threat. The councillors on the committee soon lost interest but the Bushland Management Working Party soldiered on. We were deprived of support except a room to meet and some staff attendance. We chaired the meetings, bought the minute books and took, typed and distributed the minutes.

By early-1982 however, council had accepted the working party's recommendations and allocated \$35,000 for a survey of bushland and the publication of a pamphlet for ratepayers about urban bushland, and \$25,000 for production of an educational film on bushland (Newsletter 9, February 1982). In 1983, Robin Buchanan undertook the bushland survey. It was a massive two-volume report that set a baseline for all council reserves. The working party also wrote a Plan of Management for Ku-ring-gai Bushland, which was adopted by council and published in October 1984. Chapter subjects were allocated to the working party members Helen Petersen, Harley Wright, Janet Fairlie-Cuninghame, Colin Cashman, Dick Ottaway, Rosemary Pye and Murray McCafferty. Murray was the main contributor from council staff. The working party chairman, John Burke, coordinated and edited the work as well as contributing some sections.



The plan of management, survey, film and pamphlets were major early achievements of the working party, acknowledged in Newsletter 21 (June 1985). It would not be too far-fetched to say that STEP representatives had helped to change council's attitude towards the natural environment – and that this is one of STEP's major successes. For more information on the working party see p 14, and for a comprehensive overview of Ku-ring-gai's bushland committee see STEP Matters 141 (September 2007).

The Australian Association of Bush Regenerators was established in 1986 out of concern for the continuing survival and integrity of bushland and its dependent fauna. In 2017 the AABR put on a lunch for what they called the pioneers of bush regeneration (see photo), those visionary and committed people who took the concept from the Bradley sisters, developed it, sat on committees, turned it into a tech course, wrote text books and generally created a new approach to bushland management. Apart of course from working in the bush themselves.



STEP became concerned at the state of an area at West Pymble in which the Metropolitan Water Sewerage and Drainage Board had laid sewerage pipes. They were concerned with the Board's proposed repair work on a badly damaged section of bushland. After a meeting between STEP representatives and a Board engineer and a forester, the Board agreed to repair the damage without using exotic rye grass. Instead, indigenous plants and seed were used. There was also concern at the build-up of soil around tree trunks.

### Lane Cove River State Recreation Area

A draft *Plan of Management for the Lane Cove River State Recreation Area* (SRA) was released in early-1981. Areas north of De Burghs Bridge were proposed to constitute a 'non-intensive pedestrian access area', essentially maintained and restored as far as possible to its natural state. STEP, not surprisingly, welcomed this development and indicated a willingness to be involved as a representative on the SRA Trust.

The SRA would be associated with the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) (and later become part of Lane Cove National Park, see p 18).

The SRA Trust agreed in its draft *Plan of Management*, and at STEP's prompting, to classify three areas as protection areas:

- the diatreme at Browns Field;
- a closed-heath area with *Banksia ericifolia* near Ashburton Avenue (*B. ericifolia* was one of the species first collected by Joseph Banks in 1770); and
- all remaining pockets of ridge-top vegetation in the Upper Lane Cove Valley.

The diatreme is a rare example in the Sydney region of a volcanic pipe formed by a gaseous explosion; when magma rises up through a crack in the Earth's crust and makes contact with a shallow body of ground water, rapid expansion of heated water vapour and volcanic gases can lead to a relatively shallow crater and a rock filled fracture (the actual diatreme) in the Earth's crust.

In 1984, STEP was granted over \$80,000 to manage a community employment project to train and employ six unemployed people to rehabilitate a weed-infested gully of rare rainforest in the diatrema at Browns Field. Helen Petersen and Yvonne Langshaw managed the project: Helen led the regeneration team on-site and Yvonne managed the not inconsiderable payroll and other administrative work.

By late-1986, when the project ended, several hundred trees and shrubs had been planted and large volumes of weeds removed. The trees and shrubs had all been propagated from material from the site, with help from the council nursery and members of the Society for Growing Australian Plants. The project also won the Keep Australia Beautiful, Suburban Section, award for 'advancing the aims of the Keep Australia Beautiful Council in its campaign for a better environment' (Newsletter 25, July 1986).

STEP welcomed the beginning of work on a walking trail from Sydney to Newcastle, a bicentennial project. In 1982 committee members had taken part in a demonstration walk from Boronia Park to South Turramurra along the Lane Cove River. In mid-1984 the project was approved by the Bicentennial Authority and would become the Great North Walk. The annual spring bushwalk in September 1985 was along that part of the new track from the end of Kissing Point Road to De Burghs Bridge.

## Bushwalks

STEP members obviously, and often very passionately, loved and enjoyed the bushland with which they were so involved, and they wanted to share that passion with others, as well as encourage others to become STEP members and take part in the practical management activities. For this reason, as well as for public education reasons, STEP conducted an ever-increasing program of bushwalks in the Lane Cove Valley and, somewhat later, beyond its boundaries, initially in other mainly North Shore bushland areas.

The first STEP-organised bushwalk in August 1981 took a large group of about 200 along the so-called STEP Track, developed largely by Alan Catford and John Booth to show the diversity of

the South Turramurra bushland ecosystems (see p 19). Later, about 80 people attended a September 1982 walk in Fox Valley.

Many, many more bushwalks have followed over the years up to the present: they have been led by many people, but most notably by Alan Catford, John Martyn and Andrew Little. These bushwalks were for shared enjoyment of the flora, fauna and landscape values, but also for educational and promotional ends.

John Martyn was a keen bushwalker and environmentalist well before joining STEP, and he saw the walks he led as offering enjoyment and environmental education (interview, 19 Jan 2018).

In early-1982, the committee began work on a map of the walking tracks in the Lane Cove Valley, with the aim of making self-guided bushwalks more feasible. This was a long, drawn-out process that only came to fruition in June 1990 (see p 19).

## Speakers, meetings and newsletters

The newsletters, a series of guest speakers, and sometimes films, served the twin purposes of education and promotion. There were also attempts, often quite successful, to reach the broader community through the local press, representations to Ku-ring-gai Council and other bodies, and via venues such as shopping centre stalls.

Regular meetings and AGMs usually included guest speakers addressing environmental and conservation topics, sometimes with local relevance, sometimes with a broader focus. These events fall into three broad groups. First, there were those talks related specifically to the local environment, especially its flora and fauna, but also to practical management matters. Secondly, there were talks of a broader conservation and environmental nature, perhaps also on topics like flora and fauna, but more generally based. Third, some talks and films related to particular, significant environmental and conservation controversies further afield, such as the Great Barrier Reef and South-West Tasmania. A 'meet the candidates' session was held before the 1983 council elections, something repeated in later years (see Appendix 3: Guest speakers).

In like manner, from early days STEP newsletters alerted members and other readers to environmental matters in the broader community. For example, the February 1981 newsletter (not numbered as there is a gap in the numbering sequence) listed the future of the Hunter Valley and Great Barrier Reef, endangered species and loss of wilderness and the cutbacks in federal funding for organisations highlighting these issues.

On a more practical level, the August 1981 newsletter gave information on recycling options and the May 1982 newsletter gave suggestions for native plants for district gardens. The July 1982 newsletter specifically stated that: 'STEP offers advice and limited help to residents and groups with bushland problems'. It also said that STEP welcomed ideas and information, thus attempting to build a two-way dialogue with the local community. These types of material have continued to be included in newsletters, and reflect the environmental issues that evolved over the decades.

### Committee matters

STEP members, individually and at an organisational level, became increasingly involved in other local and more widely based environmental and conservation bodies. For example, STEP became a member of both the Union of Lane Cove Valley Conservationists and the Nature Conservation Council (NCC) (president's report 1980). STEP sent delegates to NCC meetings and other events, including the NCC annual conference, and received valuable practical and moral support from NCC in return. This interaction has continued to the present.

Also, in 1983 an environmental education group was established under the guidance of Robin Ruys as convenor, a role she maintained into 1984. A special area within the grounds of Turramurra Public School was used in this endeavour, with a small group of children meeting with a non-teacher adult every Thursday. Janet Catford and Margaret Booth were both central to this program, too. As well as providing age-relevant environmental education, much planting of local species took place in a bushland area behind the school.

From the very beginning, STEP members have been noted for their attendance at many meetings of Ku-ring-gai Council and for frequently addressing council in the short time available for members of the public to do so. Council meeting agendas and minutes were monitored even if not all meetings were actually attended.

Membership increased during this period and by the end of 1981 STEP had 150 members. Committee meetings were by then being held in the Auluba Road Clubhouse instead of in committee members' homes (although there has since been a return to the previous practice), and the AGMs, usually with speakers, were held in St Philip's Church Hall.

Helen Petersen retired as president in 1982 after a key role in the first few years of STEP's existence, but returned to the committee from 1984–89. She was appointed in 1985 to the Lane Cove River State Recreation Area Trust. Then in 1985, Alan Catford retired as president, but continued on the committee, and Yvonne Langshaw became president after years as secretary or treasurer. Bruno Krockenberger, a member since the very earliest days of STEP, joined the committee in 1989, largely because of concerns over freeways. Bruno later became a multi-office-bearer (see p 21).



Helen Petersen

## CHAPTER 3: MATURITY AND INCORPORATION, 1986–98

As STEP matured and shifted its focus it tried to become a more effective organisation for influencing council and government policy through having policies on issues and presenting them effectively. Some of the main issues STEP campaigned long and hard against were the destruction of bushland due to the construction of roads, e.g. a freeway through the Lane Cove Valley, an access road at University of Technology Sydney (Ku-ring-gai Campus) and widening of Arterial Road. And it was during this time that STEP began publishing maps and books developed by John Martyn.

### Incorporation and name change

In 1986, STEP became an incorporated entity. Incorporation was a condition of receiving the grant for the second stage of the diatreme rainforest regeneration project at Browns Field (see p 9).

Briefly, incorporation under the *Associations Incorporation Act* 1984 provided the capability of suing and being sued and the power to hold, acquire and deal with property. Section 16 of the Act would give members and officers protection against being liable to contribute towards 'the payment of the debts and liabilities of the incorporated association or the costs, charges and expenses of the winding up of the association' (Newsletter 24, March 1986).

A solicitor had been consulted and a draft constitution drawn up embodying the objectives of STEP's original constitution, along with related rules. These needed to be approved by a special general meeting. Public liability insurance had been taken out as that, too, was necessary for the diatreme project funding. The certificate of incorporation arrived in time for STEP's eighth AGM in September 1986.

A consequent issue was raised in Newsletter 31 (August 1987): should STEP change its name? It was suggested that now, following incorporation, membership was no longer limited to residents of the Comenarra Ward of Ku-ring-gai Council, and that the organisation might have outgrown the South Turramurra designation. Although the primary concern was still the bushland in that area, STEP had become a more universal group with wider areas of concern, especially with members now in the West Pymble and Fox Valley areas.

It was agreed at the 1987 AGM that a near-future general meeting be asked to vote on a name change from South Turramurra Environment Protection Inc (as it had become with incorporation) to STEP Inc; this procedure needed to be followed to satisfy the requirements of the Corporate Affairs Commission. This did away with the location specificity while clearly retaining a strong link with the past.

By early-1988 the organisation was officially known as STEP Inc. Two clauses needed to be added to STEP's constitution to enable it to receive tax exemption and members approved this addition at a general meeting in July 1989.

Further more substantial constitutional changes to obtain tax deductibility for donations and to update 'certain references' were put to the 1996 AGM and passed unanimously. From 25 June 1997 donations made to the STEP Environment Protection Fund became tax deductible.



Advertisement in the *Hornsby Advocate* (4 March 1987)



Celebrating STEP's 10th anniversary at the 1988 AGM

### STEP's role reviewed

Newsletter 52 (August 1991) included a piece titled *STEP's Role Reviewed*. It stated that the committee saw its role as being embodied in the three following areas:

- building STEP into a more effective organisation for influencing council and government policy through having policies on issues and presenting them effectively;
- securing a large membership base to give weight to STEP initiatives; and
- identifying long-term issues which would be the environmental problems of the future and influencing community attitudes towards them.

The committee asked for input from members on these or any other matters. A decided lack of response by the next newsletter led the committee to conclude that the members were happy with the general direction it was taking.

In November 1995 the committee sent a survey questionnaire to all members, and 61 households replied. The five environmental issues that were ranked highest (Newsletter 77, February 1996) were:

- road construction activities or threats in local bushland;
- weed invasion of local bushland;
- water pollution of local creeks;
- the threat to local fauna by feral animals; and
- promotion of public transport options.

All had been key concerns of STEP and had featured frequently in newsletters, the last perhaps less than the other four.

Respondents also provided comments on STEP activities. Perhaps surprisingly, STEP's involvement in hands-on bush regeneration proved a contentious issue: 26 people said STEP should be involved, 21 that it should not, and 10 were undecided. It appears to have gone off the agenda by the time of the president's report to the 1996 AGM, although individual members were still active, for example in South Turramurra and Fox Valley.

This was an example of STEP maturing and its focus shifting. The bush regeneration campaign had in a sense been won as there were by this time large numbers of trained regenerators and local council programs were being developed.

A clear majority, however, thought STEP was active enough in lobbying, but a majority were undecided as to whether or not STEP was adequately represented on other committees.

### Vision for Ku-ring-gai

Another important STEP position was presented during 1996. This was titled *The Environment of Ku-ring-gai: The Next Four Years*. In Newsletter 79 (July 1996) the following statement is made:

STEP is unashamedly a single interest group which seeks, while supporting technical and cultural progress and innovation, the preservation of the natural and built characteristics of Ku-ring-gai which we all find so attractive.

Our vision is for Ku-ring-gai 50 years hence to be essentially the same as it is now rather than for it to metamorphose into another Paddington, Vaucluse or Chatswood. In order to control our own destiny we must first understand those forces for change which are at work in our community.

The article then goes on to list the environmental objectives the committee proposed council should address, and to deal with the first three in some detail. These three are:

- management of bushland under council care;
- management of other bushland; and
- stabilisation of population growth in Ku-ring-gai.

Three of the remaining four objectives were similarly treated in [Newsletter 80](#) (August 1996). These are:

- preservation of Mona Vale Road bushland corridor;
- development of an Australian streetscape; and
- rejection of freeways and roads as a means of reducing congestion.

The seventh, lowering the amount of waste that goes to landfill, seems to have fallen by the wayside. Perhaps it was no longer seen as a STEP issue, or it was thought that STEP had done all it could.

## Bushland management

In 1997 STEP stalwart, John Burke, was presented with a citation by Ku-ring-gai Council for the contribution he'd made to the conservation and management of bushland. Since formation of the Bushland Management Working Party in 1981, Ku-ring-gai had become the pre-eminent council in bushland management in the Sydney region, not only because of the initiatives such as the Plan of Management for Urban Bushland and educational film on bushland (see p 8), but also because they had successfully implemented in the field the emerging theoretical basis for bushland management. STEP continued to be represented on council's bushland management advisory committee and played an active role in its activities until the committee folded about 30 years later.

Council's Plan of Management for Urban Bushland preceded the NSW government's SEPP 19, so STEP was very pleased to see the release of Ku-ring-gai Council's Draft Bushland Management Plan (*Ku-ring-gai Urban Bushland — State Environmental Planning Policy No 19 — Draft Plan of Management*). Ku-ring-gai was, in fact, the first council to produce such a plan in

response to the state policy. Now STEP was keen to see money allocated so that the plan could be put into effect. A public meeting was held to discuss the plan and STEP members were strongly encouraged to attend.

STEP was also involvement with the Lane Cove Valley Stormwater Management Study, partially funded by the Water Board's Special Environment Programme, as well as with the Lane Cove Total Catchment Management Committee.

## Bushfires and hazard reduction burning

Another concern was an apparent increase in council reliance on hazard reduction burning. A valuable *Banksia ericifolia* heath, habitat for many small bird species, was endangered, as were plants of the rare *Darwinia biflora*. As just one example of the adverse effects of injudicious burning, *B. ericifolia* takes some seven years to set seed and is killed by fire, so more frequent burning will lead to its local extinction. Eight or more tracks had been hacked through the bush, directly down the slope, presumably in preparation for the burning. NPWS wanted involvement in monitoring regeneration, as did STEP, and STEP insisted that council take remedial action if erosion and/or weed invasion occurred.

Bushfires became a major concern in January 1994 after large-scale fires burnt most of the bushland from Fullers Bridge to South Turramurra (see Figure 1). One article from [Newsletter 65](#) (February 1994) details the spread of the fires over a number of days and touches on recovery already occurring. A second article revisits the STEP approach to fire hazard reduction by hand clearing methods, rather than hazard reduction burning, and also deals with other issues of which residents in areas at risk should be aware.

STEP's autumn bushwalk later that year was along the burned out STEP Track (see p 19). Robin Buchanan, who led the walk, pointed out and spoke about regeneration growth.

The coronial inquiry into these disastrous bushfires seemed to come down firmly in favour



of paid labour undertaking hazard reduction work by means of burning. STEP continued to advocate hand clearing for bushland adjacent to residences, seemingly placing them at odds with the coronial inquest recommendations (Newsletter 82, February 1997).

### Lane Cove Valley freeway

STEP had always been aware of the danger to urban bushland posed by the old Lane Cove Valley freeway corridor. The corridor had been set aside by the engineer John Bradfield, of the NSW Department of Public Works and Harbour Bridge fame, and no-one in the 1940s thought that inappropriate. Its possible construction was rumoured in late-1980, and was on the agenda for many years to come. If this road had been built it would have nearly totally destroyed the character of the Lane Cove Valley. Newsletter 19 (November 1984) put concerns as follows:

Construction of the Lane Cove Valley freeway from Pearce's Corner to Fig Tree Bridge will destroy much of the fragile bushland in the STEP area and the valley generally. The adverse effects include loss of bushland area, fragmentation of the remaining bushland, siltation of waterways, intrusion of weeds and loss of visual and recreational amenity because of the structural intrusion and increased noise.

However, in early-1986 a freeway through the Lane Cove Valley appeared more likely as a contract had been let for the section from Berowra to Pearce's Corner. STEP, through Newsletter 24 (March 1986), sought input from members in anticipation of a campaign against later stages through the valley. A small group, including STEP members, walked the whole route to get a first-hand look at what would be lost and in 1987 STEP produced a position paper on the Lane Cove Valley freeway; a second edition was published in 1990. This was important in providing repudiation of the then conventional wisdom that radial freeways to CBDs reduced congestion and informed many people who became involved in the campaign. The argument became far more than saving bushland, it became also about traffic management and congestion and so the debate was widened.

When the Department of Main Roads published the *Roads 2000* report in early-1987, the Lane Cove Valley freeway was not on the construction program, but its corridor from Pearce's Corner to Epping Road was not on the program for release, either: construction after 2000 was still possible. Other sections were, however, ruled out as no longer required (Newsletter 29, May 1987).

John Burke prepared a submission on STEP's behalf and STEP met with local member, and soon to be premier, Nick Greiner, who made it clear that the Coalition would not proceed with the Lane Cove Valley freeway.



Helen Petersen (top), Yvonne Langshaw (bottom left) and Judy Messer (bottom right) accompanying Bob Carr, Minister for Planning, on a walk along the proposed freeway corridor (April 1987)

In 1989 STEP responded to the North West Sector Road Needs Study published by the RTA. This is where the terms B1, B2, B3 etc were introduced to describe the nine alternative routes to link the F3 at Pearce's Corner with the proposed Castlereagh Freeway (which subsequently became the M2).

Both the Coalition Against Lane Cove Valley Freeways and People Against Valley Freeways were formed and people from the wider community became involved.

In 1990 the government announced the release of the B1 corridor. As [Newsletter 45](#) (June 1990) put it 'STEP is triumphant'. This was a major victory, however the B2/B3 corridor was still very much on the agenda.

Finally the B2/B3 corridor was abandoned in June 1996, freeing 11 hectares of bushland from the threat of freeway development (although doubts still remained over its rezoning, see p 24).

[Newsletter 78](#) (July 1996) reports:

In 1986, STEP took the first initiative to save the bushland in the Upper Lane Cove Valley from the development of what was envisaged as a freeway ...

More than seven years later, and after continued and concerted efforts, politicians of all parties, and key bureaucrats, were persuaded that the doubtful benefits of such a road were far outweighed by its negative effects, not only on the local bushland but also on the overall metropolitan planning.

STEP had a lot to do with that great result but so did others in the community – Ku-ring-gai Council, John Watkins MP, Elaine Malicki, Caron Morrison and others were crucial in the win.

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### **B1, B2 and B3**

All three corridors ran from the F3 at Pearce's Corner through Wahroonga, Fox Valley and South Turramurra and then across the Lane Cove River to join up with the M2 (originally the Castlereagh Freeway) near Macquarie University. B1 and B2 would have bisected South Turramurra:

- B1 was the existing Lane Cove Freeway corridor;
  - B2 (a variant of B1) veered south, following Kissing Point Road; and
  - B3 went through bushland on the western edge of South Turramurra.
- 

### F3 exit ramps

During 1991 there was a furious debate over the question of whether or not to install exit ramps off the F3 Freeway at Junction Road, Wahroonga ([Newsletter 62](#), June 1993). A widened road corridor would then link Junction Road with Killeaton Street, Mona Vale Road at St Ives, and subsequently Roseville via Arterial Road.

One point made strongly is that new or wider roads almost inevitably become used to capacity and overall motor vehicle use rises. STEP referred to this phenomenon as 'demographic feedback', although it is perhaps as much 'lifestyle feedback'. As new roads are built there is a reduction in travel times, so people decide to drive instead of using public transport, or to leave for work or other activities later, or to live further from those activities. Roads soon become congested again and people start making the opposite decisions. Related to this is the increasing population of the Sydney urban region.

### Widening of Arterial Road

[Newsletter 49](#) (February 1991) reported on the widening of Arterial Road from two lanes to four. STEP was particularly concerned about the effects of the works on bushland sections around Rocky Creek at Gordon and Gordon Creek at Lindfield. Council's Bushland Management Party, took this up and was assured that bushland verges, batters etc would be fully restored to RTA standards.

Council also authorised a traffic study to determine the need for the isolation and alienation of over a hectare of bushland north of Koola Avenue. The existing design called for a dangerous corner subject to head-on collisions to be corrected by cutting a new road through good bushland. STEP's president, John Burke, proposed that council reconstruct Arterial Road on its existing alignment because it was the safest, most environmentally acceptable and cheapest option – as a result council saved \$4,000,000.

## Mona Vale Road

Throughout the 1990s, STEP argued against commercial development along Mona Vale Road, believing that the corridor should be preserved as bushland landscape. Janet Fairlie-Cunninghame (KUBES) and Elaine Malicki (Ratepayers Association) worked tirelessly to put the case for preservation (see [Newsletter 51](#), June 1991; [Newsletter 80](#), August 1996; [Newsletter 99](#), November 1999).

## Urban consolidation

[Newsletter 60](#) (February 1993) included the first substantial policy statement presented in this form of communication *Urban Consolidation — STEP Policy Statement*. (It was not the first publicised policy statement, but the first in a newsletter.) The statement sets out kinds of urban consolidation typified by their aims. Acceptable aims to STEP are to renew rundown or depopulated areas densely developed in the past, and housing, such as retirement villages, that balance types of housing stock in a particular area. Housing an ever-increasing population or going against the wishes of a local community are not seen as acceptable. To localise the issue:

STEP opposes urban consolidation as provided for by the current laws of NSW because it will lead to the degradation of both the natural and built environment of Ku-ring-gai.

A lengthy background piece follows the succinct introductory statement.

In November 1993 ([Newsletter 64](#)) attention is drawn to two NSW government discussion papers on infrastructure and development (*Sydney's Future*) and transport (*An Integrated Transport Strategy for Greater Sydney*) calling for public submissions, something the committee was encouraging members to take up. The article reiterates the need for a population policy and states that:

... we are concerned that ill-considered development will irreversibly change the nature of our residential areas, whose main attraction is the natural matrix of trees and space.

Of course that is now exactly what is happening as the population of Ku-ring-gai and surrounding suburbs soars under the state and federal governments' high growth policies.

## Netball courts again

A ghost from the past came back to haunt STEP in mid-1986. It was learnt that moves were afoot to extend parking for the Canoon Road netball facility. Fears were that the easiest option would be taken, that of clearing more bushland adjacent to the Water Board track that ran off the existing carpark.

STEP wrote letters of opposition to council and met aldermen and council officers on the issue. Already cleared land in nearby streets was suggested as an alternative. A meeting of interested parties was organised by council to consider this contentious matter. STEP argued that no more of the precious ridge-top area should be used for parking. This was felt to be especially important as bushland surrounding the netball courts contained a rare Christmas Bush occurrence and some of the last remaining Christmas Bells in the Lane Cove Valley.

STEP proposed that a management plan for the courts and their environs be prepared, especially taking into account the fragile nature of the rare ridge-top vegetation. It was decided that, after submission to interested groups, the plan should be implemented 'to arrest further informal encroachment into the bush, by vehicles, erosion and weeds' ([Newsletter 29](#), May 1987).

Traffic management issues were also in need of further consideration. STEP representatives spoke in open forum at the council meeting on 15 September 1987 and council resolved to undertake a number of positive actions to provide parking other than in current bushland areas, and to improve traffic conditions. It was felt that the measures were a step in the right direction.

In late-1987 or early-1988 the Netball Association received \$15,000 from the Department of Sport and Recreation for lighting of the complex. STEP had always opposed this, and the mayor of Ku-ring-gai said in a letter to STEP that he would vote against it. [Newsletter 35](#) (July 1988) reported that:

We have been informed that temporary lighting is to be installed at the courts, Canoon Road, and used until new courts can be built and lit at North Turramurra at some future time. Further, the netball season is to be extended throughout the year, increasing the environmental difficulties already being experienced.

Council had, however, set aside a substantial sum to allow erosion control and restoration work around the netball courts.

In 1991 the Ku-ring-gai Sporting Association demanded that the Canoon Road netball courts be lit and have increased parking, and strongly suggested that they should have tiered grandstand seating. If carried out, these 'improvements' would see bushland and local amenity sacrificed for the convenience of netball players. STEP opposed these changes.

In the mid-1990s, STEP participated in constructive dialogue with the Netball Association and local resident groups to establish substantial common ground in finding solutions to problems surrounding the complex. STEP, however, still saw total relocation as the best long-term solution.

In 1998, Ku-ring-gai Council issued a Discussion Paper on the Canoon Road Recreation Area for exhibition and public comment. STEP was involved in discussions leading to this paper's release. It led to a plan of management, but no substantial change in usage.

### University of Technology Sydney (Ku-ring-gai Campus)

For nearly twenty years, STEP was on committees involved with the conservation of urban bushland at the University of Technology Sydney (Ku-ring-gai Campus) at Lindfield (see *STEP Matters* 140, July 2007).

In 1990, UTS lodged a development application with Ku-ring-gai Council for construction of an access road from Lady Game Drive through the environmentally sensitive College Creek area. A committee was formed and STEP's representative (John Burke) proposed an alternative route through a less sensitive area. This was accepted but eventually the access road was abandoned, as

was a proposal for a railway station. In 2003, UTS announced its intention to cease using the site as a university and, in conjunction with CRI Australia, to seek rezoning for a residential development.

The community lost a university and some bushland and gained dense housing in a precinct with high fire risk and poor road access. However over 9 hectares (22.6 acres) of bushland was transferred to NPWS. In addition, the community input succeeded in winning some improvements including a reduction in the number of dwellings approved for the site, the retention of a full-sized oval for community use and in retaining heritage buildings on the site. Recently, a walking path has been constructed from Lady Game Drive to the developed area, a much better outcome than a road.

### Lane Cove National Park

The issue of a single management authority for the Lane Cove Valley bushland and secure long-term protection had always been a key interest of STEP (see p 3) and so STEP has continuously lobbied on this issue with mixed success. STEP welcomed the change of status when Lane Cove River State Recreation Area regained the title of national park in 1992.

STEP produced a position paper on this topic and in 1997 STEP called for all authorities to transfer all open space under their control, if it were part of the Lane Cove Valley bushland, to the national park so that it could all be managed as one unit (*Newsletter* 82, February 1997).

A discussion on this issue took place after the business session of the 1998 AGM with Lynne McLoughlin from Macquarie University and Terry Wilson, District Manager of the Lane Cove National Park, as speakers (*Newsletter* 93, November 1998).

Over 300 hectares was added to the national park in 1999, included Sugarloaf Point Reserve and Pennant Hills Park; then a small area of bushland around Browns Waterhole (having been spared annihilation by freeway construction, see p 9) was added in early-2003. Hornsby Council had, by the time of writing, transferred considerable areas of land, but Ku-ring-gai Council had still not done so by mid-2018.

## STEP Track

STEP took part in Heritage Week each year, normally by providing a bushwalk. In 1989 this was along the STEP Track, highlighting possible impacts of road proposals (see above): close to 300 walkers attended and the walk was led by Yvonne Langshaw and Alan Catford (Newsletter 38, May 1989).



STEP Heritage Week walk and B3 protest (16 April 1989)

In an effort to develop a system of high quality walking tracks in the municipality, Ku-ring-gai Council successfully applied for a grant to upgrade what had been known for many years as the STEP Track.

The STEP Track originated when some of the early STEP activists such as Alan and Janet Catford, John and Margaret Booth and Helen Petersen decided that a walking track should be made in South Turramurra which showed more of the diversity of the bushland. On 3 April 1993 over 100 people gathered at the end of Kingsford Avenue to attend the official opening (Newsletter 61, April 1993).

Subsequently improvements have been made to the STEP Track (see p 37).



Margaret Booth

## Map of the Lane Cove Valley

In early-1982, the STEP committee began work on a map of the walking tracks in the Lane Cove Valley upstream from De Burghs Bridge, with the aim of making self-guided bushwalks more feasible. Graeme Aplin, a geographer from Macquarie University, became involved in the project and in 1984 compiled a draft map, but this required STEP volunteers to walk all the tracks and verify their positions.

By July 1986, draft contour maps for the walking tracks map had been prepared and much progress had been made in plotting the main walking tracks. Margaret Booth was the key STEP person involved, working with Graeme Aplin, and coordinating STEP members walking the tracks to verify their positions. The work was progressing well in mid-1988, and by April 1989 a 'high quality draft' had been prepared by Aplin, and the cost of cartographic and printing services was being investigated (Newsletter 37, April 1989).

By June the map was ready for production and STEP was finalising negotiations with the Central Mapping Authority in Bathurst to do the final cartography and printing. The Paddy Pallin Foundation had agreed to make STEP an interest-free loan to cover costs.

The map, *Walking Tracks in the Upper Lane Cove Valley*, was finally advertised for sale in Newsletter 45, June 1990, and was launched by Tim Moore, the State Minister for the Environment as a prelude to a bushwalk on 19 August.



STEP president, Jenny Simons, and environment minister, Tim Moore





Seven years later the committee decided that a revision was needed, both because virtually all copies had been sold, and because of the effects of the 1994 bushfires (see p 14) and the M2 motorway (see p 15). In 1998, a call went out for volunteers to walk the tracks, coordinated by John Martyn (see p 25).

### Field Guide to the Bushland of the Lane Cove Valley

In early-1992, the committee accepted a proposal from John Martyn to produce a guide to the Upper Lane Cove Valley. It was thought that the project would be completed in about a year, and that money raised through sales would provide STEP with additional funds. The book, ultimately titled *Field Guide to the Bushland of the Upper Lane Cove Valley*, was ready for sale to members before Christmas 1994, but not officially launched until the following February, when Robyn Williams (the well-known ABC science presenter) did the honours. More than 800 copies were sold within a year and so a reprint of 500 copies was ordered in late-1995.



Robyn Williams

### Expanded newsletter content

A departure from past practice came into effect in 1986–87 when there appeared in newsletters the first of an ongoing series of extensive summaries of talks, papers and newspaper articles on topics of broader environmental and conservation interest and importance. For example, Newsletter 31 (August 1987) summarised a *Rain Forest Timbers Leaflet* published by the Rainforest Information Centre.

Newsletter 44 (April 1990) included an article by John Martyn, *Decline of Native Fish Populations in Twin Creeks Reserve*. John would contribute many more articles in future years. Others have also contributed many valuable and relevant pieces over the year, including in 1990 two by Darrel Larkins on local birds: she contributed many more pieces over subsequent years. Some other recurring newsletter topics were the green economy, cats, (human) population numbers, urban stormwater, motorways (generally), recycling and waste management, Clean Up Australia days, Heritage Week, and the Ku-ring-gai Wildflower Garden. Elections and other aspects of politics at the local, state and federal levels all received coverage, too. Reviews of relevant books also became a recurring feature.

Newsletter 49 (February 1991) reported that, after the extremely damaging storm of January 1991, some people in the municipality had spoken out in favour of weakening the tree protection orders and cutting down tall trees to protect homes. STEP expressed grave doubts about these proposals. For excellent summaries of the storm see *South Turramurra: A Special Place* published by the Kissing Point Progress Association ([www.kppa.org.au](http://www.kppa.org.au)) and *The Storm* published by Ku-ring-gai Council.



Cr Elaine Malicki after the 1991 storm



Newsletter 74 (September 1995) was a special edition which focused on the Ku-ring-gai Council elections. STEP had written to all candidates enclosing a questionnaire addressing issues important to STEP and its aims. The newsletter included the full questionnaire and a summary of responses by those candidates who gave them. Eight did so, three sent their election material, and seven did not respond at all. STEP also organised a public meeting in the Comenarra Ward in conjunction with the Kissing Point Progress Association: all five ward candidates attended and faced questions from the public. This was by far the strongest involvement to date of STEP in a council election.

Newsletter 91 (September 1998) publicises activities in the Cowan Catchment and the Hawkesbury-Nepean Week events, two signs of a widening of STEP's focus of attention. The November 1998 walk saw a further widening with a guided moonlight walk in Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park, and many walks much further afield followed.

### Committee matters

At the 1988 AGM, Yvonne Langshaw stood down as president, to be replaced by Jenny Simons. Yvonne had been on the committee since 1981 and president since 1985: she continued as a committee member until the 1991 AGM.

In 1989, Helen Petersen decided not to stand again for the committee, of which she had been a member since the formation of STEP in 1978, and its president from 1979 until 1982. She was an early influential figure in the NSW and Australian bush regeneration movements, along with the Bradley sisters. Helen Petersen (Preston) was awarded an OAM (Medal of the Order of Australia) in 2011 for her tireless work for the environment, particularly in bush regeneration. She was an initial organiser and first president of the Australian Association of Bush Regenerators.

At the 1990 AGM, three stalwarts joined the committee or upgraded their role: John Burke replaced Jenny Simons as president (Jenny moved away from Sydney), while Helen Wortham and John Martyn were elected to the committee for the first time. All three have played important roles in STEP from that time until the present

(2018), and in earlier years as well in the case of John Burke. John Burke has not been a committee member in all years, however, stepping down in 1996 but returning a decade later.

There was another changing of the guard in 1997:

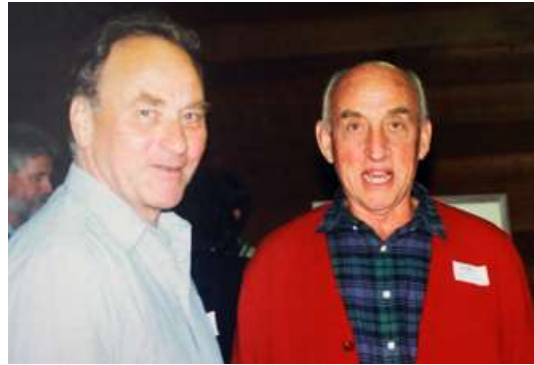
- Geoff Suggate did not stand for re-election: he had been a committee member since 1983 and treasurer from then until 1995; he had revamped the computerised membership records and he set up STEP's first website on his home page (Newsletter 82, February 1997);
- Sue Jones, secretary for a decade, also did not stand again; and
- Bruno Krockenberger stood down as president, but remained on the committee and continued to edit and largely write the newsletter.

Bruno had been treasurer in 1991–95, joint secretary in 1997–2000, and president in 1993–97 and 1999–2000. He held two positions at once for some time and was crucial in helping STEP through rather lean times. He also contributed STEP-related articles to the *Sydney Observer* for some time, until that journal changed hands and character, and was briefly a member of the Ku-ring-gai Regional Environment Advisory Committee.

Membership remained strong at 350. KUBES (Ku-ring-gai Bushland and Environment Society) was unfortunately dissolved in 1998 and its 55 members transferred to STEP. One of the KUBES committee members, Bill Jones, joined the committee.

In 1995, Pam Morse left a bequest of \$5000 to STEP and this amount was invested in a separate interest-bearing deposit. Pam Morse was the STEP secretary for a short period in 1986–87 and a keen supporter of STEP more generally. In 1997 it was decided to use this money to make a grant of \$250 annually available to students engaged in the study of any aspect of urban bushland. The students would be engaged in research at honours or postgraduate level in any of Sydney's universities. The next year the value of the annual grants was increased to \$400. Subsequently, grants were also made to local schools to assist with their environmental education programs. STEP's environmental education program has continued to expand (see p 27).

And finally, STEP's 20th birthday in 1998. The celebrations were in large part to honour the pioneers who founded STEP and steered it through its early, difficult years. The anniversary event took place in Jenkins Hall at the Lane Cove National Park on Saturday 30 May. Some reminiscing took place, as one would expect. Seven of the eight STEP presidents were present, as were Arthur Willis (head of the northern region of NPWS), Cr Elaine Malicki and local MPs Barry O'Farrell and John Watkins (Newsletter 90, July 1998).



Bruno Krockenberger and Bob Cross



Densy Clyne entertained guests with whimsical reminiscences of her Turramurra garden, which provided a source of inspiration and fostered her love of nature



Yvonne Langshaw



Seven of the eight STEP presidents Michelle Leishman, Greg Bloomfield, Bruno Krockenberger, Helen Preston, John Burke, Yvonne Langshaw and Alan Catford (Jenny Simons is missing)

## CHAPTER 4: STEP IN ITS THIRD DECADE, 1999–2008

STEP remained vigilant after its 20th anniversary celebrations and did not rest on its laurels, considerable though they were, but continued to develop and expand its range of interests, both geographically and topically. As reported in *STEP Matters 135* (July 2006):

The work being done by the Blue Gum High Forest group is of the utmost importance, the proposed sale of the UTS site is a potential tragedy, the construction of the F3 to M2 link is still not finalised, Sydney is looking to double its population over the next 60 years or so with consequent environmental stress; the list of issues is endless. There are wider issues, such as global warming and the consumption of the world's finite resources, where STEP can contribute to local opinion formation.

### Parramatta rail link

STEP was supportive of the proposed rail link from the North Shore line at Chatswood to Parramatta (as originally proposed), but was concerned at the crossing of the Lane Cove Valley. STEP considered both a bridge and a cut-and-cover tunnel to be unacceptable due to their impact on the valley: deep tunnelling was favoured, with the possibility of the line connecting to the North Shore line at St Leonards rather than Chatswood. STEP contributed to the EIS for this project. This project and STEP's concerns were addressed at greater length in *Newsletter 100*, March 2000.

STEP's position allowed for a low-level river crossing with strict conditions attached, and this, as had many previous matters, showed that the organisation was not intransigent, but prepared to reach sensible compromises when a possible beneficial outcome justified them. In the event, there was deep tunnelling under the Lane Cove Valley, but the connection to the North Shore line remained at Chatswood.

### Blue Gum High Forest Group

In 1997, Blue Gum High Forest (BGHF) was listed as a threatened ecological community under the NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act, and Ku-ring-gai was fortunate to have the largest remnant in existence in St Ives. However its viability was threatened if development went ahead on a privately owned property next to Dalrymple Hay Nature Reserve and so the Blue Gum High Forest Group was formed, led by Nancy Pallin and STEP committee member, Neroli Lock (*STEP Matters 122*, February 2004).

STEP hosted the BGHF website ([www.step.org.au/campaigns/blue-gum-high-forest](http://www.step.org.au/campaigns/blue-gum-high-forest)) and was the lead organisation for this group which aimed to preserve all BGHF in perpetuity.

The BGHF group developed an application to have the community listed as 'critically endangered' under federal legislation, produced and distributed brochures, lobbied politicians at local and state level, led walks and made talks on the BGHF and made submissions.

After a year of sustained lobbying and hard work, the group had a major victory – a determination of the BGHF as a critically endangered ecological community under the federal Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. Also, half of the privately-owned BGHF was bought by the state government for conservation purposes. See *STEP Matters 132* (November 2005).



Local federal MP, Brendan Nelson, Nancy Pallin and Cr Anita Andrew at Dalrymple Hay Nature Reserve

Over \$70,000 was raised from individual donations and the Australian government made a contribution of \$350,000 and eventually in December 2007, Ku-ring-gai Council purchased 'the last piece of the jigsaw' of the BGHF – which meant that the entire 18 hectares of forest would be kept intact for future generations.

Many people and organisations were involved in the successful conclusion to the BGHF campaign. As reported in *STEP Matters 143* (February 2008):

We are often critical of our politicians and bureaucratic processes but in this case everyone involved should be given great credit for delivering a great environmental outcome.

### Morona Avenue

In 2000 STEP was successful, along with Ku-ring-gai Council and the National Parks and Wildlife Service, in gaining an Environmental Protection Authority stormwater trust grant to control stormwater pollution and weed infestation at Morona Avenue, Wahroonga.

STEP's role, led by Neroli Lock (committee member) and Michelle Leishman (president) was to provide educational material and coordination (*Newsletter 105*, November 2000). They also worked on the design of the stormwater detention basins, kept an eye on contractors, met with officers from Lane Cove National Park, organised information leaflets to residents, designed brochures and signs, organised information days, collected water samples for analysis, and set up a bushcare site (*Newsletter 111*, December 2000).

On Sunday 26 May 2002, a very successful open day was held at the Fox Valley Storm Water site to celebrate completion of the works (*Newsletter 113*, December 2000).



Arthur Willis (NPWS) and local state MP, Barry O'Farrell at the Morona Avenue open day

### F3—M2 link road

In 2002 the RTA commissioned, on behalf of the Australian Government, a study to identify a route connecting the Western Sydney Orbital (M2/M7) to the F3 to relieve pressure on Pennant Hills Road and Pacific Highway. As a result STEP appointed Kate Read as its part-time paid project officer to formulate strategies and publicity on transport and environmental issues.

Kate was based at the NSW Nature Conservation Council, but reported to a steering committee of STEP members. Her initial tasks were to prepare a position paper defining STEP's stance in relation to metropolitan transport and its environmental impact, and to contribute ideas and information. The position paper (*F3—M2 Proposed Link*) covered issues such as urban planning, sustainable transport and air pollution, and voiced concern that a link road was being proposed in the absence of an integrated transport system.

Kate became involved in many aspects of proposed transport projects, represented STEP in discussions, contributed articles to *STEP Matters* and produced a brochure entitled *What would a F3—M2 Link Road Really Mean?* In November 2002, STEP received a grant of \$1000 from Ku-ring-gai Council's 2002 Financial Assistance Program, part of which went to produce this brochure.

The *F3 to Sydney Orbital Link Study* was published in 2004 and it recommended an 8 km tunnel under Pennant Hills Road, but there was vocal opposition to it and so a review was carried out. STEP made yet another submission and Judge Pearlman's August 2007 report confirmed the tunnel as the best option.

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We spend far too much time planning for vehicles, and far too little time planning for people.

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Although the B2/B3 corridor for a Lane Cove Valley freeway was abandoned in 1996 (see p 15), doubts remained over its future. The abandoned corridor provided a relatively continuous piece of bushland, with some cleared and grassed areas. It was STEP's strong belief that all intact bushland remnants should be retained and protected as bushland. As pointed out in *STEP Matters 121* (November 2003):

One of the most serious threats to urban bushland is the ongoing reduction by small increments. Urban bushland can only retain its biodiversity values in the long term when it remains in relatively large and un-fragmented pieces. Connections between small remnants are vital for movement of species, both animal and plant.

STEP lobbied long and hard for protection of the bushland through zoning for permanent conservation, produced and distributed a flyer calling for preservation of the bushland and made detailed submissions to Ku-ring-gai Council regarding the rezoning. They commented on all the precincts of the corridor and strongly urged council to zone them as Open Space (Bushland). *STEP Matters 128* (March 2005) reports on the draft local environment plan which was eventually adopted by council.

*STEP Matters 156* (August 2010) reports that Ku-ring-gai Council was proposing to enter into a memorandum of understanding with the Department of Planning to allow development of the B2/B3 corridor for release and subdivision. Although this was a done deal, STEP asked council to take tree preservation and flora and fauna protection into account. Councillor Elaine Malicki was tireless in seeking the removal of the corridor.

## Maps and books

Lane Cove Valley map  
Work on the new map of walking trails in the Lane Cove Valley was progressing well in early-1999, with 60% of the tracks having been checked by volunteers. Coverage extended to Tambourine Bay, almost to Sydney Harbour. This map, like the previous one, would be produced in collaboration with the Surveyor General's Department, which would provide base information.

John Martyn, well versed in computer mapping through his profession as a geologist, was creating a digital file combining this background information with the walking tracks superimposed on it. Upper and lower parts of the valley would be shown on opposite sides of the same sheet, and additional textual information would be provided. This new revised and improved map was launched in November 2000. A high level of sales was achieved in a very short period after the launch.



Jenny Schwarz, Jane Gye and Michelle Leishman



Hugh Roberts and Bill Jones



Marjorie and Ross Street and Glenn Johnson



Elaine Malicki and Pat Stewart

Middle Harbour maps

STEP and John were considering a similar map for the Middle Harbour catchment area, to be prepared in conjunction with conservation groups in that area. Work on this map was progressing well in the latter part of 2001; this became two maps that were launched in November 2004.



John Martyn at the launch of the Middle Harbour maps at Caley's Pavilion, Ku-ring-gai Wildflower Gardens

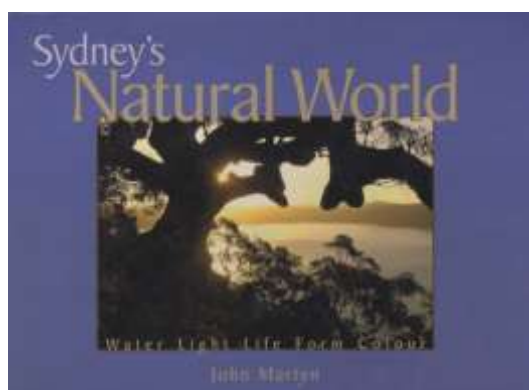
Field Guide to the Bushland of the Upper Lane Cove Valley

Sales of the *Field Guide to the Bushland of the Upper Lane Cove Valley* had depleted stocks to a few dozen only and a reprint was being considered in late-2000. The reprinting was undertaken in 2002. A longer term, possibly five-year, project was a complete revision of the guide. Sales of the existing guide and the various maps helped place STEP in a healthy financial position.

Sydney's Natural World

Another book produced by John Martyn, *Sydney's Natural World*, well-illustrated with photographs and including interpretive text, was launched in November 2007 by Tim Entwisle, Executive Director of the Botanic Gardens Trust Sydney.

STEP's president, Barry Tomkinson, secured sponsorship of \$20,000 from Zurich Australia to assist with printing costs. This was critical at the time to get the book published and is probably the largest ever donation to STEP.



Tim Entwisle at the launch of *Sydney's Natural World*

Given past and future ventures, it was not inaccurate for STEP Matters 138 (February 2007) to refer to John as 'our resident author'. Sales of John's books and maps spread acknowledgment of STEP's name and added appreciably to the organisation's funds. Many other community groups must be green with envy.

## Environmental education grants

STEP saw the education of students in ecological matters as very important for the future of Australia and so they started regular funding of environmental education in 2001 using donations made to their environmental protection fund and also through a bequest left to them by Pam Morse (see [www.step.org.au/grants](http://www.step.org.au/grants)).

STEP has supported the Young Scientist awards since 2001 and each year they donate a prize for the best environmental project. The competition is organised by the Science Teachers' Association of New South Wales and is open to students from kindergarten to year 12. They have also given grants to local primary and high schools for their environmental projects.

In 2017, STEP began supporting the Threatened Species Children's Art Competition organised by Forestmedia, an organisation that is aiming to increase community awareness of the plight of our threatened species and help to develop the next generation of environmental leaders, and then in 2018 STEP initiated their inaugural John Martyn Research Grant for the Conservation of Bushland which is directed at honours, masters and PhD students.

## Newsletter and, later, *STEP Matters*

In June 2002, STEP's newsletters were renamed *STEP Matters*. This change certainly made the point that STEP indeed does MATTER in the local community's desire to preserve its natural environment.

As in 1995, a special edition of the newsletter (97, September 1999) was produced to focus attention on Ku-ring-gai Council's elections. Twelve candidates answered the STEP questionnaire, three replied but did not directly answer, and 18 did not respond at all. The last group unfortunately included three local Comenarra Ward candidates.

John Martyn, Bruno Krockenberger, Jenny Schwarz and Michelle Leishman were regular contributors. John excitedly announced the first sighting of a Brush Turkey in the Lane Cove Valley in *STEP Matters 115* (September 2002) – see also p 40. Short articles were intended to make

readers aware of all sorts of relevant matters and helpful hints, on topics such as (in 2003–05): native bees, the fire wheel tree, dieback due to *Phytophthora*, ticks, renewable energy, climate change, National Tree Day, weedkillers and amphibian decline, nuclear energy, geosequestration of CO<sub>2</sub>, and that decidedly not at all simple topic, capitalism. Book reviews were included from time to time, along with reports of relevant talks to other groups.

A record was achieved in September 2007 when *STEP Matters 141* was published with eight pages (not all subsequent issues were that large, but in 2009 one number of *STEP Matters* reached 16 pages, for example, as did some later issues).

## Website

A most notable advance was the advent of STEP's excellent website at [www.step.org.au](http://www.step.org.au) — apart from anything else, this history would have been much more difficult to compile without it. A great deal of information about the organisation and its campaigns is contained within the site, and all newsletters and president's reports from 1978 are available therein. The site was up and running by mid-2001 and was the result of much effort by Helen Wortham, Michelle Leishman, Chris Maxworthy and Tim Gastineau-Hills, and it has been kept in excellent, user-friendly condition ever since. In addition, e-mail became increasingly important as a means of communicating with members, as did electronic bank transfers as a means of paying for membership and publications.

## Submissions

STEP has made many hundreds of submissions over the years.

Ku-ring-gai Council released a *10/20 Year Strategic Plan* on which it invited comment from the community. John Burke submitted a detailed contribution, and an edited version was included in *Newsletter 94* (February 1999).

In July 1999, STEP raised issues with changes to the NSW *Planning and Assessment Act 1979*, seen as facilitating development at the expense of reduced community rights and with a failure to engage with ecologically sustainable

development principles. It was 'regarded by people concerned with environmental conservation as negative and extremely damaging' ([Newsletter 96](#)).

[Newsletter 96](#) also expressed deep concern over amendments to Ku-ring-gai Council's planning documents, including its Residential Strategy. Again, environmental protection was seen as being decreased. In 2000, STEP made a submission to council on its Draft Residential Strategy. Also, it was reported that the Commonwealth was in the process of devolving environmental protection to the states, and concern was also expressed in regard to the federal *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Bill 1998*, passed into law in the following year.

In 2005–06, STEP made submissions in response to Ku-ring-gai Council's *Draft Plan of Management for Bushlands in Ku-ring-gai* and their *Draft Biodiversity Strategy*, which were put out for comment. STEP was also monitoring council's Town Centres Policy.

After bushfires in January 2002, STEP made a submission to the NSW Parliament's Select Joint Committee on Bushfires, concentrating on the responsibilities of residents living adjacent to bushland areas and ways of preventing destruction by fires. In [Newsletter 112](#) (April 2002), STEP also addressed fire-related issues, more specifically in the context of the Ku-ring-gai Council area and council's bushfire management policies.

## Committee matters

In May 2000, Janet Fairlie-Cuninghame was awarded the Lions Club Community Service Award for Services to the Environment. STEP had nominated Janet for this award, citing her long-term activism and commitment to the Ku-ring-gai environment. She was the inaugural chair of the Ku-ring-gai Bushland and Environment Society (KUBES) and a founding member of Ku-ring-gai Council's Bushland Management Working Party, two groups with which STEP had frequent and constructive interaction. Janet represented KUBES on the even broader umbrella group, the Union of Lane Cove Valley Conservationists.

It was reported in [STEP Matters 136](#) (September 2006) that STEP's over 450 members were drawn from over 60 postcodes, though still including many from South Turramurra. A neighbouring environmental group, Thornleigh Area Bushland Society (TABS), approached STEP in 2006 with a view to amalgamation, TABS members to be transferred to STEP. This occurred in early-2007, and two TABS members, Graham Jones and Barry Tomkinson, joined the committee.

Hugh Roberts joined the committee in 1995, and was treasurer from 1996 until 2002. Hugh was the NSW Crown Solicitor from 1976 until 1994 so he was helpful on many fronts. This was when STEP's publishing activities got off the ground and he oversaw the financial aspects of that development. Hugh's resignation was a great loss to the committee. As reported in [STEP Matters 117](#) (February 2003):

... we formally acknowledge Hugh's magnificent commitment to STEP for the last six years. Amongst other things, Hugh has looked after our finances, maintained membership records and distributed publications. His workload is now shared by three people!

Long-time committee member, Jenny Schwarz resigned in August 2005 when she moved to Hobart. Jenny enjoyed bushcare and she had a particular interest in mammals – indeed she wrote the mammals section of the Lane Cove Valley field guides.

In 2006, Michelle Leishman stood down as president after a long and invaluable time in the role, however she remained on the committee until 2009. She had become involved due to living on the edge of the Lane Cove Valley bushland, and because of her academic involvement in ecology and biology. In addition, she was one of many people from the neighbouring Macquarie University to be involved in STEP in one way or another. However, this did not mean an end to Michelle's interest and involvement.

It was in one way an agreeable return to the past, though, as John Burke agreed to take on the president's role. John had been involved in STEP activities since the 1980s and had been president from 1990–93.



Neroli Lock was awarded the Lions Club of Ku-ring-gai award for services to the environment for 2007, primarily for her work to preserve the Blue Gum High Forest. Neroli stood down from the committee in that year after many years of good service.



Neroli and Harry Lock

In 2008, Bruno Krockenberger resigned after nearly 20 years of service to STEP, including as newsletter editor for several years, treasurer and secretary for periods, and as president from 1993–97 and 1999–2000 (see p 21).

On a more positive note, 2004 saw three new members join the committee, probably the greatest influx in any single year. One of these was Jim Wells, who, over the next five years, streamlined and reorganised STEP's financial affairs. Unfortunately some members left in 2005, but John Burke returned to the fold, and Andrew Little joined too.

In mid-2006, membership was at a very healthy level of over 450.



Tim Gastineau-Hills and Jim Wells

### Frustration and achievements

It is worth quoting at length a frustrated editor's (John Burke's) lament in *STEP Matters 140* (July 2007) under the heading *Why are we Bothering? To Avoid becoming an Unpitied Sacrifice in a Contemptible Struggle?*

As your newsletter editor nears completion of this edition after considerable research and writing there is a nagging voice that keeps asking why. Is life too short, are we wasting our time, and who reads the bloody newsletter anyway?

OK, some of you do read it, we know because about three people a year give us feedback. But why don't more people get angry and do something? The thought that one could be taking a bushwalk, sharing a bottle of wine with friends or wandering around the south of France does sometimes occur. No that's wrong – it often occurs. When one looks for a reason for persisting there is a quote from Edmund Burke who said:

When bad men combine, the good must associate; else they will fall, one by one, an unpitied sacrifice in a contemptible struggle.

So who are the 'bad' ones? They are those whose forward planning goes as far as the next election, those who care little about the environment so long as the money rolls in, those who seem wedded to some sort of biblical imperative to tame and use the world only for humans, those who believe that it will be good for Sydney to have 30 million people and for the world to have 10 billion and those who know that all of that is bad and do nought about it.

So now that almost everyone has been roped in and offended, you are invited to consider some of the issues in this newsletter.

The politicians, from council and up, all say soothing things and some vote responsibly but under their careless management Sydney is doomed to become a nasty megalopolis. We are running out of playing fields and yet we cram more people in, we are losing urban bushland every year and yet the Adventists and UTS and others can set out to destroy it as if it is of no value. There is only three percent or so of the original Blue Gum High Forest left and yet Ku-ring-gai Council dances to the developer's tune on the Beechworth Road to Warragal Road site. The NSW government introduces Part 3A of the *Planning and Environment Act* to strip the

community of the right to meaningful input on larger developments and the opposition votes with them and then says 'tut-tut we didn't really mean to'!

And worst of all, our main environmental groups can find it in their hearts to lecture us on our individual carbon output when our population increase grinds inexorably on and China is commissioning a coal-fired power station once a week. It is surely for them that the term 'fiddling while Rome burns' was invented.

STEP was looking for someone to write its history for both its 20th and its 25th anniversaries. The present author wonders why no-one took up the challenge! He hopes the wait has been worth it. *STEP Matters* did, however, contain a lengthy summary of its activities and achievements nearing its 30th birthday, and that is worth quoting in full (*STEP Matters* 135, July 2006).

The Role of an Urban Environmental Group

Near our 30th birthday it's appropriate to review again just what we are doing.

STEP arose from the bulldozing of bushland for a sports centre, but then went on to play a key role in the introduction of bushland management as we now know it, to lead the opposition to the Lane Cove Valley freeway, and to be involved, often successfully, in many other issues.

STEP with a membership of over 450 is one of the largest in NSW. We have an excellent, if somewhat weary, committee and are financially secure. When there are no major issues to fight there is less demand for the environmental warriors who are prepared to confront bulldozers — although those people will certainly be needed again. It is inevitable, however, that any lack of vigilance will lead to a loss of the gains we have made. There are many who seek to exploit the environment.

STEP has always published: the *Plan of Management for the Lane Cove Valley* 25 years ago may have been the first in NSW. Maps of Middle Harbour and the Lane Cove Valley and the *Field Guide to the Upper Lane Cove Valley Bushland* followed. We have published position papers on contentious issues and these have been influential. STEP has participated in countless committees.

We respond to invitations to comment on plans of management for bushland including for national parks. We meet with key managers from the organisations involved, as well as with councillors and politicians.

Every year we organise bushwalks. We have had several talks every year on subjects as diverse as the Antarctic, ticks and brush turkeys.

We have a modest programme of financial support to schools for environmental projects. We also contribute a yearly prize under the Young Scientist programme.

Finally, we run the business of the organisation. Accounts, returns, insurances etc all have to be managed. And of course we publish this newsletter.

We think this is all worthwhile.

The work being done by the Blue Gum High Forest group is of the utmost importance, the proposed sale of the UTS site is a potential tragedy, the construction of the F3 to M2 link is still not finalised, Sydney is looking to double its population over the next 60 years or so with consequent environmental stress; the list of issues is endless. There are wider issues, such as global warming and the consumption of the world's finite resources, where STEP can contribute to local opinion formation.

We are looking at publishing a photographic and interpretive book on the wonders of our Sydney bushland and, inevitably, other such opportunities will come along.

The agenda is quite different to 25 years ago. The urgency of global issues means that dealing with local matters will be in vain in the absence of solutions to our global warming, energy and population problems. Our newsletter will deal more and more with these wider issues because they will be very much local in effect.

The environmental challenges will be never ending. To be ready to deal with them we must keep our membership and finances at healthy levels and continue the renewal of the committee. If we achieve all that then we shall continue to be effective.

## CHAPTER 5: MORE RECENT TIMES, 2009–18

Many of STEP's issues continued to be local, however STEP felt that the urgency of national, international and global issues meant that dealing with local matters would be in vain in the absence of solutions to global warming, energy and population problems. As a result STEP began to tackle these wider issues because they would be very much local in effect, e.g. STEP produced a position paper on population because it felt that an economic model predicated on infinite growth is impossible in a world of finite resources.

STEP felt that a restructuring of the global economy was needed, and was heartened when renewable energy and resource recycling began (slowly) to gain momentum.

The 2010 president's report states:

It is our joint challenge for 2011 and beyond to focus the minds of all of our elected leaders on the real long-term environmental challenges facing both Australia and the world at large.

### Position Paper on Bushland Tracks and Trails

STEP has the view that there are many positive aspects to a system of well-planned and well-maintained tracks and trails in urban bushland, and that when combined with good signage they open up the wonders of the bush and promote conservation education. Tracks and trails should be part of a system which protects the bushland, should be appropriately managed and should enhance the enjoyment of bushland by locals and visitors.

Over the years STEP became increasingly concerned about the push for new bike tracks and other developments in national parks and high quality bushland which led to the decision to write a Position Paper on Bushland Track and Trail Policy.

A public meeting in August 2010 was held to discuss the policy. STEP Matters 155 (June 2010) publicised this meeting and included the following explanatory material:

STEP members would be aware that we support the construction of properly designed and professionally constructed tracks and trails in certain bushland areas. These are generally to be located in what is regarded as degraded and non-sensitive urban bushland. We are however concerned at the environmental damage that thoughtlessly designed tracks and trails in more sensitive areas can and do cause.

STEP has therefore had a subcommittee working on producing a policy and reference paper specifically addressing the issue of track and trail building in bushland. This work arose out of our concern that, given the pressures arising from a growing urban population, the demand for recreational access to bushland was leading to long-term damage to the immediate bushland and to a loss of biodiversity across the region.

STEP is concerned at the absence of an accepted robust framework for local authorities and others to use to make sound environmental judgements when they are assessing the likely impacts of new trails and tracks.

This evening will see the public release of the new STEP policy, to be followed by a Q&A forum with representatives from a variety of interested groups.

The panel comprised both conservation and mountain bike representatives and was a continuation of STEP's commitment to an open debate on both the pros and cons of building tracks and trails in urban bushland.

As a result of STEP's participation in the debate about the construction of both legal and illegal tracks and trails in bushland, STEP was invited to comment on a NSW government discussion paper on mountain biking in national parks and reserves (see STEP Matters 157, October 2010).

## Position Paper on Population

Since STEP's early days, newsletter articles discussed the environmental impacts of population growth. Indeed, STEP organised two politicians to speak on the subject of the politics of population in Australia and its impact on meaningful climate change action: Lee Rhiannon (NSW Greens) in 2009 and Barry O'Farrell (local member and leader of the opposition) in 2010. Neither of them said anything sensible on the subject. After O'Farrell's talk a member of the audience asked if he had misread the invitation as nothing had been said about population.

In 2011, STEP reviewed the population strategy exercise conducted by the Australian government and found it wanting (*STEP Matters 161*, August 2011) and later that year John Burke wrote, and STEP published, a Position Paper on Population.

Three of the recommendations in the position paper were that the Australian Government:

- formally acknowledge the unsustainable nature of the world's still growing population and take whatever steps it can to support efforts to first stabilise and then reduce world population to sustainable levels by:
  - taking a strong public position both within Australia and on the world stage;
  - supporting programmes to reduce poverty and particularly those initiatives that educate and empower women;
- determine a sustainable population goal for Australia and put policies and a timetable in place to achieve it; and
- recognise that the fuel-based, car centred, throw-away economy is no longer a viable model and adopt the mutually dependent goals of stabilising population, eradicating poverty, restoring the economy's natural support systems and sustaining the world's ecosystems by limiting fossil fuel use, overall land clearance and urban waste production.

It was hoped that the discussion paper would form the basis of discussion with other environmental groups and be argued strongly in the public arena.

The same policy paper was adopted by the Nature Conservation Council in 2015.

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We see that at our current rate of growth of about 2% per annum, Australia will have some 90 million people in 75 years and Sydney 18 million. With the lower rates of growth some are talking about it will take a little longer but the result will be the same.

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The following is from STEP's website:

So what is our vision?

We would like our leaders at all levels to openly discuss the issue. We want our leaders to appreciate that there cannot be infinite growth in a finite world and we would like them to plan to do something about it. It must be appreciated that there are many wealthy countries without increasing populations that are doing well and that per capita wealth, rather than GDP, is the real measure of financial well-being.

We have heard many politicians at the state and local level say that they cannot do anything about the problem because it's all the fault of the Federal Government. We see that as the ultimate cop-out. State and local government leaders have an obligation to engage the Federal Government on all issues affecting their domain. They engage with them on health, education, the Murray-Darling and other such issues. Would it not be negligent to not engage them also on population?

Of great concern was that, in addition to all the major political parties, the major environmental groups refused to discuss population growth. They were cowed by shallow media coverage of the issue, such as the threat of being accused of racism. It is a shame that these environmental groups that are bold on confronting so many other world problems have given in on this fundamental issue about our long-term future.



## Sydney Adventist Hospital Development

While STEP never had any problem with the hospital expansion plans proposed in 2007, they did object to the over-development of other aspects of the project. Concerns intensified when the developer had the minister call the project in under Part 3A of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act in December 2007. This effectively removed the development from the decision making of the local community.

STEP was appointed to the community reference group which was set up in March 2008 to provide community consultation. The group met five times and STEP worked hard to highlight and identify both the environmental and infrastructural impacts and shortcomings of the various proposals.

STEP's submission to the Department of Planning was strengthened by an excellent submission from Ku-ring-gai Council. Both submissions challenged many of the inaccurate representations made in the concept plan. In the end in a number of important changes were made:

- the number of private residential dwellings was reduced from 2000 to 500
- certain road links were removed
- the school hall and oval were relocated
- a lower scale of housing was decided for Mount Pleasant Avenue
- the development footprint was scaled back
- the amount of conservation land was increased from 18 ha to more than 30 ha
- half of the site was quarantined from development due to its 'significant environmental value' and the presence of endangered ecological communities such as the Sydney Turpentine Ironbark and Blue Gum High Forest

However, the size and scale of the rest of the proposal did not alter much, the height limit for some buildings was increased to six stories and the traffic infrastructure to support the new suburb remains a significant problem area and one without an apparent solution. For more information refer to STEP Matters 154 (April 2010).

Currently (2018) much development is going ahead, but at a smaller scale than originally proposed and with little loss of bushland — traffic is certainly chaotic on Fox Valley Road and the Comenarra Parkway.

STEP Matters 182 (September 2015) reported positively that Coups Creek, flowing through the site of the SAN Wahroonga Estate was now protected. The area involved includes a 34-hectare area of E2 environmental conservation zoned bushland, home to some of the best remnants of Sydney Turpentine Ironbark Forest and Blue Gum High Forest. The land is privately owned by the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, but is open to the public and maintained by the grounds team of Adventist Aged Care (Wahroonga) and the volunteer group, Wahroonga Waterways Landcare.

Another Wahroonga proposal came to the fore in late-2011, continuing into 2012. This was for an athletics field to be jointly developed by Abbotsleigh and Knox schools on the Glade Oval. STEP was asked by Friends of the Glade to provide expert assistance on the environmental aspects of the proposal. STEP agreed that the peaceful nature of this communal recreational area would be lost and that the reserve would be unavailable for non-school users for considerable periods if the proposal went ahead. After another successful round of public protest, the proposal was quietly dropped, having failed to receive council support primarily due to the threats to the surrounding Blue Gum High Forest the development would incur.

## Future of St Ives Showground

In 2010 STEP was part of a community consultation process set up by Ku-ring-gai Council to help to establish a long-term plan for the future use of the St Ives Showground area. STEP made several site visits to the area and in its submission suggested:

- protection of the endangered ecological community Duffys Forest;
- removal of the Ku-ring-gai Mini Wheels Training Club; and
- retention of the Wildflower Garden.

In June 2010 council released an options paper which recommended that Duffys Forest ecological community and other existing natural vegetation be protected from encroachment, vehicles, compaction, nutrients, weeds and rubbish. However an exception was the Duffys Forest vegetation on Ku-ring-gai Mini Wheels Training Club sit 'which has been damaged over a long period of time' and so a separate plan was promised to guide use.

Four years later a plan went on public exhibition and in May 2015 council adopted a *draft* plan of management. The plan is still to be finalised and endorsed by the Minister for Lands.

Meantime, council commissioned a report on developing the tourism potential of the municipality by redeveloping the St Ives precinct 'to achieve a wow factor to attract visitors, benefit residents and help grow the local visitor economy'. Many of the suggestions were for upgrading facilities but STEP was concerned by proposals for:

... unique accommodation experiences that complement these experiences (e.g. a five-star eco-tourism lodge sited near the boundary of the national parks escarpment, hostel accommodation for education and recreation groups and flash-camping).

Details are needed on how this sort of development can be achieved without damaging the environmentally sensitive E2-zoned land including the endangered Duffys Forest Ecological Community.

## National parks

There have been many articles in *STEP Matters* expressing concern with the management of national parks – there have been cuts to funding and management and the government has been looking to increase revenue by encouraging recreational pursuits such as mountain bike riding, horse riding, commercial and educational ventures.

For example in 2011, STEP noted that funds for weed eradication and general bush care in Lane Cove National Park had been cut to zero. The question STEP posed to the premier (and local MP), Barry O'Farrell, among many other questions on related issues, was:

How can there be a positive response in any priority areas in Lane Cove National Park by October 2015, as per the State 2021 Plan, when no more funding is being provided?'

The ongoing importance of bush regeneration activities was stressed in this letter to the premier. STEP also sent a letter to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage expressing its concern on this matter.

Another example was the proposal that Stringybark Ridge in the newly declared Berowra Valley National Park be converted into public playing fields despite limited road access and being located in an area containing high quality regenerated bushland (*STEP Matters 168*, October 2012).

However things went from bad to worse as reported in *STEP Matters 192* (August 2017):

There has been a steady reduction in funding since the Liberal National government came into power in 2011.

Staff numbers have been cut through regular redundancy programs so that vital long-term experience has been lost in areas like remote area bushfire fighting and vegetation restoration.

Staff have been subject to repeated restructuring, the latest being a reduction in the number of regional managers from 14 to 8. Regional managers will now have impossibly large areas to manage.

Funding has been diverted to eye catching new projects rather than repairing degraded facilities and heritage sites.

In 2009 and then again in 2012, STEP was one of a number of external stakeholders invited to participate in a review of the Lane Cove National Park plan of management. The new plan of management was finally adopted by the minister for the Environment in February 2016.

## Hunting in national parks

Despite previous statements to the contrary, in June 2012 the NSW government decided to pass legislation proposed by the Shooters and Fishers Party to allow recreational hunting in certain national parks by volunteer hunters. STEP was strongly opposed to hunting in conservation areas on several grounds, in particular public safety and the ineffectiveness of volunteer hunting in reducing feral animal numbers. The issue was given substantial attention in *STEP Matters 166* (June 2012).

Major campaigns were mounted by the Nature Conservation Council and the National Parks Association assisted by STEP in organising public forums, petitions and widespread publicity. STEP helped the National Parks Association to organise a rally in Wahroonga Park. This was highly successful with over 350 people attending the rally to hear speakers from WIRES, the Nature Conservation Council, the Greens and park rangers who explained the problems that would be created by the legislation.



Barry Tomkinson, STEP's president, addressing the rally

In yet another initiative for STEP, the 2012 AGM included a debate on the topic Hunting in National Parks is Environmental Vandalism, not Smart Conservation, between Cheltenham Girls and Epping Boys High Schools.

Major arguments against the proposal highlighted the poor management of licensed hunters in state forests by the Game Council, the body set up to administer hunting and the lack of evidence of the effectiveness of reducing feral animal numbers. In 2013 a damning report on the Game Council led to the suspension of all recreational hunting in public land. Subsequently administration was taken over by the Department of Primary Industries and safety measures were improved.

Ultimately the government decided to scale back the proposal in national parks and do some proper research on ground shooting as a method of controlling feral animal populations. In 2014 it instituted a trial of hunting in six park areas mostly in central and western NSW that contained threatened species and ecological communities. The supplementary pest control trials were scheduled and managed by the NPWS.

In 2017 a report on the trial concluded that volunteer ground shooting had the potential to be an effective supplementary pest control technique if used as part of an integrated pest management program under controlled conditions. A happy ending to a sorry saga. See *STEP Matters 194* (February 2018)

## Mining and coal seam gas

In 2014, STEP joined a group called Our Land, Our Water, Our Future which was formed to explain to people the extent of the risks to the community from proposed and current development of mining and coal seam gas.

A subset of this campaign was Protect Sydney's Water and John Martyn was STEP's representative. Longwall mining in Sydney's water catchment areas was seen as possibly affecting the quality and quantity of the city's water. It was also felt that the effects of the mining were being underplayed or overlooked, and that they were unfixable and irreversible (see *STEP Matters 173* (November 2013)).



## 10/50 legislation

Another threat to native vegetation was the 10/50 bushfire clearing legislation. In response to severe bushfires in the Blue Mountains, in 2014 the NSW government rushed through new bushfire vegetation clearing rules that had little applicability to urban areas, but nevertheless applied to all bushland areas. Submissions from urban councils, conservation groups and residents were ignored and large parts of northern Sydney were affected by rules allowing landowners to clear trees within 10 m of their house and to clear other vegetation within 50 m. The details of the problems with the legislation were explained in *STEP Matters 177* (August 2014).

Hundreds of trees were cut down, many of which were significant for their biodiversity, heritage, shade and animal habitat. In areas where councils recorded tree removal under the 10/50 rule, less than 5% were for legitimate fire-risk purposes. Most trees removed were to improve views or facilitate development, not reduce bush fire risk. STEP and many other conservation groups lobbied hard for the suspension of this legislation.

In September 2014 the government announced minimal changes to the 10/50 rule and that a review be conducted by the Rural Fire Service. Two months later, after a sustained campaign calling for a moratorium on clearing in urban areas, the government announced that the clearing entitlement areas be changed back to the old rules of:

- within 100 m of category 1 bushfire prone vegetation; and
- within 30 m of category 2 vegetation.

The report on the review was released in August 2015 and as a result of the recommendations and a strong campaign by local groups and STEP, the 10/50 legislation was modified to remove some of the most obvious shortcomings. However the basic problem remains that that landowners can self-assess whether trees and other vegetation should be cleared for bushfire protection (*STEP Matters 182*, September 2015). The previous system that required expert advice is STEP's preferred option.

## Biodiversity legislation

*STEP Matters 183* (November 2015) explained some of the concerns about the recommendations of the report on reforms to biodiversity legislation released in December 2014, particularly those relating to:

- use of self-assessment;
- watering down of biodiversity offset standards;
- reliance on voluntary private land conservation; and
- adequacy of provisions and resources to assess and monitor vegetation clearing.

The NSW government had undertaken a major review of the biodiversity legislation in response to farmers' complaints about the fairness and processes of the land-clearing laws, leading to the appointment of an independent review panel. The report of that panel, the article said, covered a lot more than rural land-clearing laws and proposed a major revamp of the biodiversity protection provisions in NSW.

STEP felt that the recommendations, which were adopted despite strong opposition from scientists, would seriously undermine protections that currently limited clearing and would be likely to lead to loss of biodiversity in rural and urban areas. *STEP Matters 186* (July 2016) heads an article on the matter: So-called Biodiversity Reforms are not Fit for Purpose. The legislation was passed in November 2016.

The biodiversity laws place a great deal of emphasis on offsetting as a means of allowing development to occur. The theory is that biodiversity lost when clearing for a development can be replaced by providing for restoration or protection of biodiversity in another place. *STEP Matters 191* (June 2017) discusses the problems with the biodiversity offset schemes.

In 2018 the Nature Conservation Council with the help of the Environmental Defenders Office won the case challenging the process of implementation of the land clearing codes. This was an opportunity for Premier Berejiklian to amend the bad laws her government had implemented and make some key improvements to protect habitat. However, she chose to stick rigidly with the same destructive laws and ignore



the science. By the government's own assessment, the laws will lead to a spike in clearing of up to 45% and expose threaten wildlife habitat to destruction, including 99% of identified koala habitat on private land.

So, the government is proceeding with this model despite warnings expressed by leading scientists, lawyers and conservationists. The government has ignored the advice of the experts because it is wants to deliver development at any cost. Implementing the biodiversity offset scheme will in fact add extinction pressures to the very species and ecological communities it is supposed to protect by facilitating the more rapid and widespread destruction of threatened species habitat across NSW.

In early-2018, STEP became concerned at the potential loss of wildlife habitat and corridors, specifically at Bayview and the former IBM site next to Cumberland State Forest where a development would seriously impact threatened Powerful Owls.

### Planning legislation

State-wide planning legislation has become a major focus because of its dominance over local development. In early-2013, STEP joined over 240 community groups in the Better Planning Network (BPN). It was formed because of concerns about the NSW government's Planning Review, and some of the planning reforms proposed in the government's Green Paper that was released in July 2012. A detailed listing of those concerns is given in *STEP Matters 169* (February 2013). By late-2013, BPN membership had grown to more than 430 groups. Ultimately the legislation failed to pass in the upper house but the government has found other ways to impose development with minimal consultation.

In February 2017, STEP was asking people to comment on *Towards Our Greater Sydney 2056* which will amend the current Sydney Metro Regional Strategy document, *A Plan for Growing Sydney* produced in December 2014. This masterplan assumes high population growth rates as a new norm and prioritises the general location and timing for the extra housing and infrastructure required. There was also the opportunity to comment on the District Plan for

the North District. Once a Draft District Plan for an area is finalised, the local environment plan for that council area will be required to comply with it. A lengthy article in *STEP Matters 189* (February 2017) addresses the key issues raised by *Towards Our Greater Sydney 2056* and the District Plan.

### Netball courts yet again

The Plan of Management of the Canoon Netball Complex was amended in 2015. It involved improvements to landscaping and changing the location of some courts and car parks. A consultative committee comprising representatives from the local community, netball players and council officers was to review the operation of the complex and in particular consider the recommendation that lighting be installed to be operated on Thursday and/or Friday evenings between 5 and 7.30 pm for some matches during the winter netball season. The aim was to reduce the problems on Saturdays of traffic movements.

The contentious plan for lighting had not been progressed until in November 2017 when Ku-ring-gai Council passed a motion that recommended a change to the Plan of Management so that lighting would be operated on four nights per week on nine courts from 4.30 to 8 pm.

STEP made a detailed submission highlighting the potential environmental impacts. Other submissions focussed on the lack of information about traffic and noise impacts and consideration of alternative sites.

In order to progress the situation, a motion was put to a council meeting on 13 March 2018 for further studies to be completed, and in particular to consider additional suitable court locations elsewhere.

### Improvements to the STEP Track

In 2012 STEP was awarded an environmental grant of \$5000 from Ku-ring-gai Council to install new signs along the STEP Track at South Turramurra. These were in place by early-2013. The signs were designed by John Martyn and included beautiful photographs of plants that can

be found along the track; they also explain and demonstrate the varying geomorphology and habitats along the track. There were four signs by early-2013 and another two signs were installed later that year.

In *STEP Matters 182* (September 2015) it is proudly reported that the STEP Track, the original one to come under STEP's care, had new steps: 'thanks partly to an environmental levy grant the track has been partially repaired'. Further repairs were completed in 2017 using another environmental levy grant.



One of the signs along the STEP Track

### Three books and a map

Field Guide to the Lane Cove Valley Bushland

STEP received a grant of \$5000 from the Bendigo Bank Community Enterprise Foundation, together with Turramurra Community Bank, to assist with publication of the new edition of *Field Guide to the Lane Cove Valley Bushland* by John Martyn. The extensively revised new edition was available for sale prior by Christmas 2010, and was launched at a function in March 2011 by Gary Dunnett, Regional Manager of the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water. This edition was hard-cover, in full colour, and 256 pages in length.

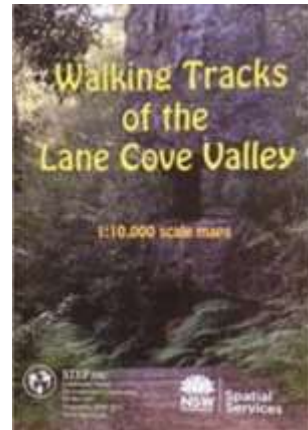
Understanding the Weather

John's third book, *Understanding the Weather: A Guide for Outdoor Enthusiasts in South-eastern Australia*, was launched in June 2013.

Lane Cove Valley map

A new, revised Lane Cove Valley map was published in late-2016. Like its predecessor published in 2000 (see p 25), it was produced by John with the assistance of a team of dedicated

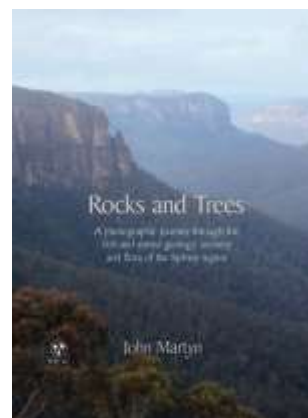
volunteers who checked the details of the tracks and names of streets etc. Volunteers included Jill Green, John Hungerford, Alan McPhail, Ralph Pridmore (who walked with Robert Carruthers and Natalie Maguire), Natalie Wood and Ted Woodley. The map covers a larger area than the 2000 map, going further north and west to cover the major connection points from the North Shore railway line and Pennant Hills.



Rocks and Trees

In 2018 John produced his fourth book, *Rocks and Trees*. As a geologist, John wanted to explain the geology that underpins the landscape and diverse flora of the Sydney region and so he produced a book which takes readers on a photographic journey through the rich and varied geology, scenery and flora of the Sydney region. The book journeys from the Illawarra along the coast to Newcastle and inland to the Greater Blue Mountains, staying within the framework created by the massive sandstones and conglomerates of the Triassic Narrabeen Group.

As stated previously, these maps and books authored by John have had all profits returned to STEP and have greatly helped STEP to be in a strong financial position.



## Public lectures

A very important event occurred on 11 October 2011 when STEP held its inaugural public lecture, not that non-members were ever precluded from attending its large talks program (see Appendix 3: Guest speakers). The talk was given by Pepe Clarke, CEO of the Nature Conservation Council of NSW, and his topic was *Saving Civilization is not a Spectator Sport*. I can say without hesitation that STEP could never have been accused of seeing conservationist and environmentalist roles as being a 'spectator sport'! This lecture also launched STEP's *Position Paper on Population* (see p 31) substantially the work of John Burke.

The 2012 STEP lecture was given by the renowned environmentalist, Ian Lowe (*The Challenge of a Sustainable Future: Converting Cumulative Impacts into Cumulative Benefits*). Further lectures were:

- 2013 Andy Pitman (UNSW) — Understanding the Science of Climate Change
- 2014 Emma Johnston (Sydney Institute of Marine Science) — Sydney Harbour: Biodiversity and Threats
- 2016 Andy Baker (UNSW) — What Caves Tell us about Climate

## Bushwalks

A regular series of walks was launched in 2002 as the New STEP Out Recreational Walks Program. It was pointed out that the existing walks program, which would continue, was:

... targeted at members who are generally fairly experienced bushwalkers and who appreciate spending time learning more about the detail of the flora and fauna encountered during the walk.

Some of the more traditional walks were becoming quite long, too. The new program would include walks on the first Sunday of most months and would be 'geared towards general bush walking and medium exercise for the reasonably fit'. These walks, run by Robert Bracht, were an attempt to broaden the appeal of bushwalking in the Lane Cove Valley and elsewhere, and to bring the positive appeal and benefits of such activity to a wider audience. Most unfortunately, Robert Bracht passed away in December 2011.

## Website and social media

STEP's website was upgraded in 2010 and again in 2016. As the annual report for 2009–10 puts it:

It is information rich and is targeted not only at existing STEP members but at all in the community who believe that we need to plan within a long-term environmental framework if we are to prevent the current tyranny of short-term decisions destroying, piece by piece, our remaining natural bushland areas and biodiversity.

In a further social media development, STEP had its own Facebook page (superbly managed by Trish Lynch) and Twitter account (incisively managed by John Burke) by late-2014.



Trish Lynch

The 2016 upgrade included an on-line shop and on-line membership subscriptions. STEP also offered to send members an e-newsletter with links to the articles contained therein so they would have the option of reading selected articles online. Other advantages of this option is that it was possible to view the photographs in colour, it saved postage and it was available to anyone accessing the STEP website, whether members or not.

## STEP Matters

There had always been longer articles in *STEP Matters*, but this seems to have reached a new high in *STEP Matters 148* (February 2009). It contains articles on: Biobanking (Simon Smith), Environmental Education Today (Rosemary Pye), Climate Action Group Seeking to Build Community Owned Solar Energy Farm (Deborah Burt), It's the Eco-Economy Stupid! (Barry Tomkinson) and Overloading Australia (Mark O'Connor, *Sydney Morning Herald*).

In the following issue, *STEP Matters 149* (April 2009), Syd Smith took up the topic of environmental education introduced by Rosemary Pye. A sign of the times was the inclusion of major pieces on sustainability versus economic growth, population and economic growth, climate change, food shortages, drought and fire. All in all, this very long, 16-page edition was not exactly cheerful or reassuring. Such a tone was, and still is, unfortunately a necessary aspect of most environmental and conservation publications and meetings.

The issues listed above reappeared again and again in subsequent issues of *STEP Matters*. In addition, cats were mentioned from time to time, generally getting a very bad press; for example in *STEP Matters 158* (February 2011) hints are given as to how to react to feral cat sightings.

On a more positive note, in *STEP Matters 149*, STEP member Ralph Pridmore wrote at length about the increase in wildlife in central and South Turramurra, giving much of the credit to reductions in fox numbers, perhaps even their local eradication. Ralph specifically comments on the large numbers of Brush Turkeys present, a very different situation from John Martyn's first sighting in 2002 (see p 27). Their proliferation in a short six or seven years, still continuing apace since 2009, is quite remarkable. A sign of global warming? Fox reduction?

While working on this history, in early-2018, a great cacophony arose at our place. On investigation, four adult Brush Turkeys were line-dancing on our metal carport roof. They proceeded to traverse our house roof and then congregate on our back deck. Immigrants from the north making themselves at home?

Having lauded the size of *STEP Matters 148* above, *STEP Matters 155* (June 2010) was also 16 pages in length and other issues since have been equally large.

*STEP Matters 148* is notable for having a series of articles reproduced from various external sources and contributed by eminent writers and organisations: Ross Gittens (Economics Editor, *Sydney Morning Herald*), Lester Brown (Earth Policy Institute, Washington), Gordon Limburg

(Hornsby Conservation Society), Australian Conservation Foundation, World Wildlife Fund.

In February 2011, *STEP Matters 158* contains a particularly wide-ranging (in terms of topic coverage) article by Haydn Washington of the Nature Conservation Council, titled Society's Worldview, Sustainable Use and the Commodification of Nature. This is yet another example of STEP's broad environmental and conservation focus by the second decade of the present century.

Then in the next issue, *STEP Matters 159* (April 2011), an edited speech by David Attenborough to the Royal Society of Arts in London is included, along with an article by Lester Brown (President of the Earth Policy Institute) on the Great Food Crisis of 2011. STEP was once again aiming high while doing a marvellous job of informing its members and other *STEP Matters* readers.

An article in *STEP Matters 178* (November 2014) tackled the thorny issue of council amalgamations, particularly the planned amalgamation of Hornsby and Ku-ring-gai Councils. Members' views on the matter were sought.

## Membership and committee

In June 2012 STEP membership numbers were given as over 400 based in Ku-ring-gai, Hornsby and surrounding suburbs. Numbers had thus held, but there had not been any major increase, something STEP members and committee undoubtedly hoped would have occurred. It seems a major local issue is needed as a catalyst for concern about local bushland or is that people don't have time any more for volunteer work?

Barry Tomkinson joined the committee when STEP merged with the Thornleigh Area Bushland Society in 2007 and served as president from 2009–11. He resigned in 2012 when he moved away from Sydney. Barry used his management experience to broaden STEP's relationships within local councils and local interest groups that facilitated understanding of local issues and led the process of writing detailed submissions. For example Barry facilitated the development of

STEP's position papers on bushland tracks and trails and population and submissions on the Sydney Adventist Hospital site, St Ives Showground Precinct Development and the contentious state government proposals to introduce mountain bike trails into our remaining areas of good quality urban bushland. Barry also edited *STEP Matters* for three years with great flair for incisive commentary and discovery of interesting material.



Barry was replaced as president by Jill Green. Jill's forays into environmental issues started with her actuarial training, providing a long-term perspective on climate change and environmental economics. A masters of environmental studies broadened her interests in working on effective policies and collaborating with other groups to solve environmental problems. Jill has authored many submissions to government (all available online) and has produced *STEP Matters* from 2012 to the present.

Robin Buchanan, prominent in the early years of STEP (see p 8), joined the committee in 2009 and was filling the vice-president's role by 2012. She has contributed several other articles to *STEP Matters* and has had a major input into STEP submissions. In 2010 she also prepared STEP's *Position Paper on Bushland Tracks and Trails*.



Robin Buchanan

John Martyn was recipient of the 2012 Ku-ring-gai Environmental Award. He has produced all of STEP's maps and books, has coordinated STEP's popular walks and talks program and been a regular contributor of often lengthy newsletter articles. John's publications have helped to educate members and the public more generally, thus fitting nicely with STEP's aims. Sales also greatly helped STEP's finances.

Helen Wortham, its hard-working secretary, received Ku-ring-gai Council's Australia Day Award for Outstanding Service to the Ku-ring-gai Community (Individual) on Australia Day 2017. As *STEP Matters* 189 (February 2017) puts it: 'Helen has been the key engine-room of STEP as a committee member since 1990 and secretary since 1997'. Helen maintains the membership records, creates communication material, edits the newsletter and publications, promotes and sells books and maps, manages the website and produces the e-newsletter.





Jim Wells was treasurer from 2005–2010, but retained an interest in STEP. He re-joined the committee in 2016 and has acted as assistant treasurer since then. Frank Budai replaced Jim as treasurer for three years and Anita Andrew took on the role in 2016. Anita, as a geologist with a master's degree in environmental management and a former Ku-ring-gai councillor, brings a great breadth of experience to the committee.

John Burke has been involved in STEP activities since the 1980s and was president from 1990–93 and 2006–08 – that's 17 years on the committee, six of which were president. He made major contributions to STEP's work on UTS Lindfield and the Sydney Adventist Hospital, wrote STEP's Position Paper on Population as well as producing *STEP Matters* where he wrote many thought provoking, perceptive and insightful articles. John resigned from the committee in 2012 but his presence is still strong as he is STEP's incisive Tweeter.

Andrew Little, a former Ku-ring-gai councillor, served on the committee from 2005–18. Andrew provided detailed analysis of local soils, vegetation and bushland restoration issues that formed the basis of STEP's submissions. In addition, he had detailed knowledge of planning laws, which also helped greatly in writing those submissions. He organised the walks program for part of his time on the committee and led bushwalks.

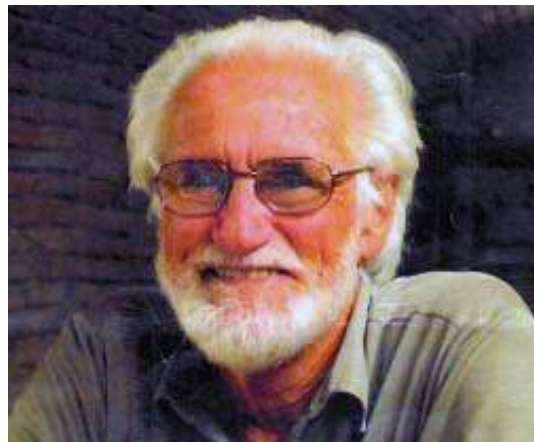
Unfortunately, this fourth decade of STEP saw the passing of many early stalwarts.

In October 2010, founding STEP supporter Jan Ruys passed away. He was the person who alerted other future members of STEP to the presence of a large bulldozer in Canon Road on the morning of 12 April 1978 (see p 4). Jan was on the committee from 1981 until 1985. After that Jan and his wife Robin remained committed STEP supporters (see *STEP Matters 158*, February 2011).

The original members of STEP were all getting on in years by the 2010s. STEP members were further saddened by the death of Alan Catford in June 2014. Alan had been an active member of STEP for over 30 years, and served as president for three years between 1983 and 1985, during the period of campaigning against the Lane Cove

Valley freeway. Alan was a keen bushwalker and conservationist, and he held committee and management positions with the National Parks Association of NSW and the Australian Conservation Foundation (see *STEP Matters 176*, June 2014).

Glenn Johnson, a committee member from 1984–92 passed away in late-2015. Glen was a sensitive person who loved the natural environment and who was passionate about his family, garden and work with the Royal Botanic Garden Sydney (see *STEP Matters 183*, November 2015).



Hugh Roberts, treasurer of STEP from 1996–2002, was another sad loss in this period, dying in 2016. An article in *STEP Matters 186* (July 2016) says it all:

He was a great guy, so easy to deal with and work with, and with his musical skills and his intense interest in all things environmental, legal and political, he was the nearest thing to a Renaissance man that STEP committee has been blessed with.





Neroli Lock, another stalwart and a member of the STEP committee for 16 years, passed away in late-2014. Neroli was an integral part of Ku-ring-gai's Bushcare volunteer program, joining in 1991, the same time she joined the STEP committee. She was an important part of two projects in Fox Valley: the creation of the Broadway Bushland Reserve and control of stormwater pollution and weed infestation at Morona Avenue (see p 24) but her tour de force was her work with the Blue Gum High Forest Group (see p 23). Neroli was a wonderfully reliable, cheerful, enthusiastic, tireless and effective champion of the environment (see *STEP Matters 178*, November 2014).



What does the future hold?

The committee was only six members strong as elected at the 2017 AGM. Stalwarts remained in the persons of Jill Green (president), Robin Buchanan (vice-president), Anita Andrew (treasurer), Jim Wells (assistant treasurer), Helen Wortham (secretary) and John Martyn (committee member). Margery Street joined the committee in early 2018. However new blood is needed, especially given the considerable workload involved, and the fact that John Martyn had already announced his retirement at the 2018 AGM.

STEP undoubtedly still has a vital role to play in defending the natural environment, and in particular national parks and local urban bushland, both from particular alienations and

developments by public and private interests, and from threats to its quality. STEP also has a vital role in spreading the word and educating the public on such issues. All of these activities will be greatly enhanced if there is greater support for STEP and a noticeable increase in membership, along with new committed people to strengthen the committee and share the load now falling on so few shoulders. Michelle Leishman (interview 14 February 2018) agrees that these extensions are needed, although people are more and more involved through the social media.

In an interview with the author (19 January 2018), John Martyn saw the need for a 'big' local issue to reinvigorate STEP, something akin to the netball courts or the Lane Cove Valley freeway proposals. He conceded, however, that if there was one and STEP did not win the argument, many members and other local residents could be devastated. Presumably they were when the Canoon Road netball courts construction went ahead.

STEP has built great credibility throughout the political and environmental worlds at the local level, and more widely, too. John Burke stated in an interview with the author (7 February 2018) that he believes that it could continue to be an effective force even if it reduced its activities. But, as John Martyn says, it needs an issue to radicalise another group of younger people, perhaps by providing a local base to pursue matters such as population, or climate change, or protection of the natural environment in a more universal sense. These are all matters to which our state and federal governments give far too little attention, except in negative ways. Committed people and organisations need to speak up to a much greater extent and much more vociferously, and this may be a role for STEP in the future.

Michelle Leishman stressed that STEP had been successful in educating and engaging the community because of the deep font of knowledge of all sorts held by the key people in STEP, something also stressed by John Burke. If this situation could continue, so could the importance of STEP's role. STEP's relevance would remain high as a result, even if there were

not the immediate local issues to fight. Michelle agreed that STEP had influenced a change of heart on the part of Ku-ring-gai Council and raised the public appreciation of the local bushland. Perhaps use of social media could increase local community involvement and increase STEP membership, as could the bushwalks and talks.

Bruno Krockenberger expressed somewhat similar views in his interview with the author (28 February 2018). He feels that Ku-ring-gai Council has been going backwards and needs a kick up the proverbial (not Bruno's words), although this back-sliding is in large part a result of the NSW government taking over more and more of the roles of local councils, particularly planning roles. All the same STEP could bring increasing pressure to bear on council. He feels that there will inevitably be local issues worth fighting, but even without them STEP has an on-going role to play in educating the local community on broader issues such as climate change and population limits, the latter stressed so strongly by John Burke. STEP could use local newspapers to a greater extent, and also social media. It could be more outspoken on these broader issues than state and national organisations who feel a greater need to tread carefully in the political minefields.

The Role of an Urban Environmental Group, written and published on the occasion of STEP's 30th anniversary and quoted from on p 30, hints that these broader issues could be, and perhaps should be, a greater focus for STEP. That challenge has only been partially met at STEP's 40th anniversary. The same piece from ten years ago also says that:

... to be ready to deal with (those broader issues) we must keep our membership and finances at healthy levels and continue the renewal of the committee.

In that, STEP has another set of challenges for the future. Furthermore, pressure must be kept up on local, state and federal governments to take environmental protection seriously, something that state and federal governments are not presently good at doing, to put it mildly.

## APPENDIX 1: MAJOR OFFICE-BEARERS

**Note:** For some reason it became increasingly difficult to fill the positions of secretary and treasurer in the early years of the 21st century and the record below is a little discontinuous. The role of secretary was, it is true, divided into a number of different components, as noted. AGMs at which people were elected or appointed were held during the year, hence the frequency of two people holding a position in the same calendar year.

### Presidents

1978–79 Greg Bloomfield, Les Csenderits  
 1979–82 Helen Petersen (Preston)  
 1982–85 Alan Catford  
 1985–88 Yvonne Langshaw  
 1988–90 Jenny Simons  
 1990–93 John Burke  
 1993–97 Bruno Krockenberger  
 1997–99 Michelle Leishman  
 1999–00 Bruno Krockenberger  
 2000–06 Michelle Leishman  
 2006–08 John Burke  
 2008–11 Barry Tomkinson  
 2011–18 Jill Green

### Secretaries

1978–79 Pat Dunne, Sandra Csenderits  
 1979–80 Janet Catford  
 1980–83 Margaret Booth  
 1983–85 Yvonne Langshaw  
 1985–86 Margaret Booth  
 1986–87 Sue Jones, Pam Morse  
 1987–93 Sue Jones  
 1993–95 Judy Meacham  
 1995–97 Vacant  
 1997–99 Hugh Roberts, Helen Wortham  
 1999–00 Hugh Roberts, Chris Maxworthy  
 2000–02 Neryle Sheldon  
 2002–07 Secretarial duties were divided between a few of people looking after different aspects of the overall task (see Other Important Positions right)  
 2007–18 Helen Wortham

### Treasurers

1978 Robin Ruys  
 1978–79 Helen Petersen (Preston)  
 1979–80 Sandra Csenderits  
 1980–83 Yvonne Langshaw  
 1983–91 Geoff Suggate  
 1991–95 Bruno Krockenberger  
 1995–96 Vacant  
 1996–02 Hugh Roberts  
 2002–04 Thérèse Carew  
 2005–10 Jim Wells  
 2010–13 Stephen Proctor  
 2013–16 Frank Budai  
 2016–18 Anita Andrew

### Other important positions

Also of great importance, but not specifically listed here, were committee members working on editing the newsletters, maintaining the website, and looking after publicity, membership and publications. Many members have been involved, but Bruno Krockenberger, Hugh Roberts, Neroli Lock and Helen Wortham stand out for their long-term commitment. It should be noted that all three also appear above in the lists of major office-bearers.

## APPENDIX 2: COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The author has done his best to make the following list complete and accurate, but gives no absolute guarantees. This caveat especially applies to the very early years of STEP.

Andrew, Anita	2011–18	Lennie, Walter	1997–2000
Berry, Lesley	1984–86	Little, Andrew	2005–17
Bloomfield, Greg	1978	Lock, Neroli	1991–2007
Bloomfield, Pip	1978	Martyn, John	1990–2018
Booth, Margaret	1980–89	Maxworthy, Chris	2000–02
Boow, Jim	1984–86	Meacham, Judy	1989–95
Buchanan, Robin	1978, 2009–18	Morrison, Tony	2002–05
Budai, Frank	2013–16	Morse, Pam	1986–87
Burke, John	1984–96, 2005–12	Perry, Ann	2003–06
Carew, Thérèse	2002–04	Petersen (Preston), Helen	1978–82, 1984–89
Catford, Alan	1981–89	Petersen, Neville	1981–82
Catford, Janet	1979, 1981, 1984–86	Power, Bernard	1986–87
Cogger, Harold	1990–94	Pridmore, Ralph	1988–90
Cross, Bob	1990–92	Proctor, Stephen	2010–13
Curtin, John	1981–82	Roberts, Hugh	1995–2002
Davidson, Don	2010–16	Ruys, Jan	1981–85
Dawson, Dot	1981–82, 1984–85	Ruys, Robin	1978–79
Dokulil, Elizabeth	1984–87	Scenderits, Les	1978
Dunn, Pat	1988–89	Scenderits, Sandra	1978–79
Gastineau-Hills, Tim	2004–12	Schwarz, Jenny	1993–2000, 2001–05
Gemmell, Susie	2004, 2007–09	Seymour, Ron	1996–97
Green, Jill	2010–18	Sheldon, Neryle	2001–02
Howlett, Ron	2004–05	Simons, Jenny	1986–90
Jennings, Andrew	1993–96	Skidmore, Andrew	1993–96
Johnson, Glenn	1984–92	Margery Street	2018
Jones, Bill	1998–2001	Suggate, Geoff	1983–97
Jones, Graham	2007–08	Tomkinson, Barry	2007–2012
Jones, Sue	1986–97	Tout, George	1981–82
Krockenberger, Bruno	1989–2008	Tuft, Robyn	1987–89
Langshaw, Fred	1985–86	Watson, Ken	1987–89
Langshaw, Yvonne	1981–91	Wells, Jim	2005–10, 2016–18
Leishman, Michelle	1996–2009	Woodhouse, Chris	1984–85
		Worrall, Helen	2014–15
		Wortham, Helen	1990–2018

## APPENDIX 3: GUEST SPEAKERS

Note: Exact titles of talks were not always given in newsletters, so in some cases these titles are broad topics only. Furthermore, the author cannot guarantee that this list is complete.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1979   | 1988   |
| Peter Myerscough — Management and Future of Urban Bushland                       | Elizabeth Dokulil — History of South Turrumurra  |
| Alan Catford (Australian Conservation Foundation) — Great Barrier Reef           | 1989   |
| 1980   | David Ellyard — The Greenhouse Effect and the Ozone Layer  |
| Dariel Larkins (NSW Field Ornithologists Club) — Birds and Bird Banding          | Tein McDonald (KMC Bush Regeneration Officer) — Weeds in Ku-ring-gai Bushland. What can be done? What is being done? |
| Helen Petersen — Tools and Methods used by STEP Bush Regeneration Group          | 1990   |
| 1981   | Ku-ring-gai Bat Colony Committee — Bats and Myths about them (with bat attendees)                                    |
| Roger Lyle (SW Tasmania Committee) — South-West Tasmania Controversy             | Harley Wright (State Pollution Control Commission) — Managing Urban Bushland with the Help of Run-off Control        |
| Graeme Phipps (Avicultural Society of NSW) — Lord Howe Island Woodhens           | 1991   |
| John Booth and Alan Catford — Bushfires and Fighting them                        | Damian Gore (Macquarie University) — Antarctic Expeditions   |
| Roger Lyle (SW Tasmania Committee) — Film on Franklin–Gordon                     | Jocelyn Howell (Royal Botanic Gardens) — Sydney's Threatened Bushland: Can it be Saved?                              |
| 1982   | John Martyn — Wildflowers of Western Australia   |
| Densey Clyne — Insects and Spiders   | 1992   |
| Marjorie Sullivan (salvage archaeologist) — Aboriginal Relics in Ku-ring-gai     | Chris Dickman and Ashok Rathore (University of Sydney, NPWS) — Koalas and Wallabies vs Foxes and Cats                |
| Harold Cogger (Australian Museum) — Reptiles and Frogs of the Sydney District    | Hal Cogger (Australian Museum) — Frogs and Reptiles  |
| 1983   | 1993   |
| Ian Brown (Manager) — Lane Cove River State Recreation Area and Browns Waterhole | Harold Spies (Microbiologist) — Fungi of the Sydney Region   |
| Ian Dunlop — Kakadu the Magnificent  | Lynne McLoughlin (Macquarie University) — The Environmental History of the Lane Cove Valley                          |
| Film: The Bush beyond your Garden: A Voice for the Wilderness                    | 1994   |
| 1984   | Carolyn Pettigrew — Waste Management   |
| Jack Purnell — Birds of the Near Inland  | Alex Ritchie (Australian Museum) — Canowindra, NSW: The World's most Exciting Fossil Discoveries                     |
| Mark Spencer — Underwater Photography  | 1995   |
| 1985   | Yvonne Langshaw — Artworks   |
| Helen George — Bats  | John Martyn — Geological History of the Lane Cove Valley   |
| 1986   |  |
| Film — A Singular Woman (The life of Marie Byles)                                |  |
| Helen Petersen — Bush Regeneration Projects in Ku-ring-gai                       |  |
| 1987   |  |
| Carrick Chambers (Royal Botanic Gardens) — The Herbarium and its Functions       |  |
| Robin Grimwade (KMC) — The Future of Ku-ring-gai's Bushland                      |  |

1996

- Lin Sutherland (Australian Museum) —  
Old Volcanoes around Sydney  
Andrew Skidmore — Computers and the  
Environment  
Durno Murray — The Wandering Albatross  
Barbara Bryan (North Shore Camera Club) —  
Photography  
Walter Boles (Australian Museum) — Evolution of  
Australian Bird Fauna

1997

- John Martyn — Mauritania  
Steve Riley (University of Western Sydney) —  
Run-off in the Lane Cove Valley  
Noel Tait (Macquarie University) — Overlooked  
Invertebrates

1998

- Jim Kohen (Macquarie University) — Aboriginal  
use of Plants  
Densey Clyne — Reminiscences of her  
Turramurra Garden  
Damien Gore — Science, Tourism and  
Environmental Crises in the Australian  
Antarctic Territory  
Lynne McLoughlin (Macquarie University) and  
Terry Wilson (Lane Cove National Park) —  
Extensions to Lane Cove National Park

1999

- Richard Major — Pied Currawongs and their  
Effect on other Birds  
Colong Foundation for Wilderness —  
Wilderness 2000  
Brendan Neilly (NPWS Field Officer) —  
Rescuing and Caring for Wildlife

2000

- Valerie Close — Backyard Fauna and Flora  
Nancy Pallin — The Role of Bats in Bushland  
Ecology  
Lesley Hughes (Macquarie University) —  
Climate Change: Is it upon us?

2001

- Jocelyn Howell (Royal Botanic Gardens) —  
Ways of Wildflowers  
Angus Finney — South Georgia Island  
Rymill Abell — Lord Howe Island

2002

- Nicola Mason (NPWS) — Fox Control Program  
Damien Gore (Macquarie University) —  
Health of the Lane Cove River  
Richard Major (Australian Museum) —  
Birds in Backyards

2003

- Anne-Marie Poirrier (Building Ecology) —  
Eco-friendly Pest Management  
Stephen Doggett (Westmead Hospital) — Ticks  
Michael Batley (Australian Museum) —  
Australian Native Bees  
Ian Hutton — Lord Howe Island Weed  
Management Program

2004

- Elma and Ray Kearney (Sydney Fungal Studies  
Group) — Fantastic Fungi: Facts and Findings  
Ron Howlett — Australian Native Orchids  
John Pickard (Macquarie University) — Which Side of  
the Fence are you on? Technology, History, Fences  
and the Future of the Australian Arid Zone

2005

- Marie Herberstein (Macquarie University) —  
How Spiders Deceive their Prey  
Michelle Leishman (Macquarie University) —  
Exotic Plant Invasion in Hawkesbury Sandstone  
Vegetation and Bush Regeneration  
Peter Davies and Mary-Lou Lewis (Ku-ring-gai  
Council) — Council's Environmental Initiatives

2006

- David Roots (UTS) — Explosive Volcanoes and  
Diatremes in Japan, Kamchatka and the Sydney  
Basin  
Ann Goeth (Macquarie University) — Australian  
Brush Turkeys, our Urban Wanderers  
Lesley Hughes (Macquarie University) —  
Climate Change and Ecological Effects

2007

- Murray Hogarth (Ecos Corporation) —  
Climate Change  
Virginia Macleod and Pauline Curby —  
Settling into Ku-ring-gai's Landscape  
Adam Stow (Macquarie University) — Grey Nurse  
Shark Genetics Program  
Alan Fairley — Rare and Endangered Plants of the  
Sydney Basin

2008

- David Tribe — A National Park in Transition:  
The Rich Past Aboriginal Heritage and Future  
Challenges Facing Ku-ring-gai Chase National  
Park  
Nancy Pallin and Jane Gye — Unspoilt Wilderness:  
The Arnhem Land Experience  
Gareth Johnston — IT and Climate Change:  
The Opportunity to Achieve Significant  
Emissions Savings  
Shelley Burgin (University of Western Sydney) —  
Biobanking: Friend or Foe?



2009

- Simon Smith (Department of Environment and Climate Change) — Biobanking: Definitely a Friend for Conservation  
Tony Capon (ANU) — Cities as Healthy Human Habitat  
Lee Rhiannon (NSW Greens) — The Politics of Population in Australia and its Impact on Meaningful Climate Change Action

2010

- Janine Kitson — Why Wirrimbirra Sanctuary is so Significant to the History of the Environment Movement  
Peter Steinberg (UNSW, SIMS) — Sydney Institute for Marine Science, Sydney Harbour and the East Australian Current  
Barry O'Farrell (Leader of the Opposition) — The Politics of Population in Australia and its Impact on Meaningful Climate Change Action

2011

- Michelle Leishman (Macquarie University) — Climate Change and Vegetation Management  
Ian Bryce — A Sceptical Talk: Can Civilisation Survive the next 30 Years?  
David Wilks (Ku-ring-gai Council) — The Natural History of Sydney  
Pepe Clarke (CEO, Nature Conservation Council) — Saving Civilization is not a Spectator Sport (public lecture)  
Kirsty Ruddock (Environmental Defenders Office) — Purpose and Role of the EDO

2012

- Matt Heffernan — So you want to be an Urban Farmer  
Ray and Elma Kearney — Fungi and the Interdependency of Species  
Syd Smith — Educating our Students and our Community for a Sustainable Future: Problems and Progress  
Robin Buchanan and Nancy Pallin — Bush Regeneration and Resilience: Local Experience of Successes and Problems  
Ian Lowe — The Challenge of a Sustainable Future: Converting Cumulative Impacts into Cumulative Benefits (public lecture)

2013

- Matt McClelland (WildWalks) — Great North Walk  
Sophia Findlay (Ku-ring-gai Council) — Water Projects in Ku-ring-gai  
Catherine Chagué-Goff (UNSW and ANSTO) — What do Tsunamis and a Harley Davidson have in Common?  
Andy Pitman (UNSW) — Understanding the Science of Climate Change (public lecture)

2014

- David Bain — Powerful Owl Project  
Terry McBride — A Zero Emissions Plan for Australia  
Michael Keats — NSW Icons under Threat  
Emma Johnston (Sydney Institute of Marine Science) — Sydney Harbour: Biodiversity and Threats (public lecture)  
Corinne Fisher (Macquarie University) — Habitat Stepping Stones Project and Planning in NSW

2015

- Geoff Sainty (Royal Botanic Gardens) — Management of Wetlands for Now and the Future  
Anita Andrew (UNSW) — What is Coal Seam Gas?  
Ross Rapmund — Changing Birdlife of Northern Sydney  
Ian Percival (Geological Survey of NSW) — Hornsby Quarry: Violent Upheavals in Hornsby, Dinosaurs Startled!

2016

- Graham Wegener — Wahroonga Waterways Landcare  
Joanna Parr (CSIRO) — Exploring the Seafloor: We know more about Mars  
Isabel Hyman (Australian Museum) — Australian Native Land Snails and Slugs  
Peter Nelson (Macquarie University) — Air Pollution  
Andy Baker (UNSW) — What Caves Tell us about Climate (public lecture)

2017

- Michael Scollay — Are there any Useful Paleoclimatology Analogies to Today's Climate Phenomena?  
Peter Coad (Hornsby Shire) — Environment Management in Hornsby  
Graeme Aplin — UNESCO World Heritage  
Paul Boon (Victoria University) — Hawkesbury River: A Social and Natural History  
David Och — What's under the Bottom of the Harbour?  
Peter Davies (Macquarie University) — Urban Ecology and Directions for Sydney

2018

- Simon Griffith (Macquarie University) — Impact of Climate Change on Birds  
Anita Andrew — Permian Triassic Mass Extinction  
Chelsea Hankin (Ku-ring-gai Council) — Threatened Species and their Habitat in Ku-ring-gai