

Stephanie



STEP Inc. Newsletter

Community Based Environmental Conservation Since 1978. No. 107 April 2001

COMING EVENTS

Late Autumn Walk-- Our autumn walk to Tambourine Bay on 18th March was a great success (see report elsewhere), so we have scheduled a "late autumn" walk for **6th May, 2001**.

This time we will meet at **Allen Park at 1.45pm for a 2.00pm start** going from De Burgh's bridge to Fiddens Wharf. John Martyn will lead and provide the commentary. (see John's "The Lane Cove Valley by Foot in One Day" later in this Newsletter).

Reminder -- "Journey to the Heart of Nature" at Ku-ring-gai Wildflower Garden, 29th July, 2001. Attendance limited to 20, "first come first served" so book early with Helen (9144 2703 or e-mail at p.helmore@unsw.edu.au). More details next time.

Ways of Wildflowers

Jocelyn Howell from the Royal Botanic Gardens gave us a wonderful insight into some of the intricacies of Sydney's bushland when she addressed about sixty members and guests at the St Andrews Uniting Church Hall in South Turramurra recently.

She used a section ('Bushland Ecology') of the new book *Sydney's Bushland: More Than Meets The Eye*, which she co-authored with Doug Benson, as reference and enlarged upon it with a series of slides showing the geological and landform characteristics influencing the nature and structure of the vegetation in the Sydney area. After the talk the brisk rate of sales of the new book confirmed the great interest in the subject indicated by the attendance.

All present were enthralled by her enthusiasm for the subject and her expert way of presenting it. Michelle presented Jocelyn with a copy of the new STEP map as a sign of our appreciation.



Field Guide Update

Our supply of the Field Guide to the Walking Tracks of the Upper Lane Cove Valley is dwindling and the Committee is considering the options for either a further print run or a completely revised edition, or both. The revised edition would be a major project and would take some years to bring to fruition.

To help the committee's deliberations it would be useful to have some feedback from members and other users of the Guide.

The aspects which you might like to address in your feedback should include:

- # *What do you like most about the Field Guide?*
- # *What do you like least?*
- # *Is the Guide too technical or not technical enough?*
- # *Are the illustrations useful?*
- # *Are there any aspects that could be covered more thoroughly? If so, which?*
- # *Is there too much detail on some topics? If so, which?*
- # *What are your views on the format or size of the book?*
- # *Are there any other points you would like to make?*

Please send any comments to The Secretary, STEP Inc., PO Box 697, Turramurra, 2074, or by e-mail to Michelle Leishman at mleishma@rna.bio.mq.edu.au or John Martyn at martyn@hutch.com.au

Tambourine Bay

On Sunday 18th March John Martyn led our autumn bushwalk to Tambourine Bay.

There was a good turnout, about 30 people, and it was a fine walking day.

Members of a local bushcare group were among the walkers, and were able to add to the enjoyment of the walk with their local knowledge.



The Lane Cove Valley on Foot in One Day

If you are looking for something more challenging than the normal STEP bushwalks, why not tackle the whole valley in one day?

From Thornleigh Oval via the Great North Walk for 25 km to the Ferry at Valentia St. on Woolwich Peninsula.

John Martyn did it recently on his lonesome and took six and a half hours. A party of walkers would tend to take a bit longer.

John found it to be a great experience to take in all the changes in landform, vegetation and

nature of the adjacent urban development in one go. What is a bit of a concern is that he found it to be pretty close to his physical limit for one day, and John is pretty fit. Here is his description:

The section from Thornleigh Oval to South Turrumurra is wonderful bushland, tall forest, rainforest, and some of the least weedy riverbank vegetation of the valley. The descent through tall forest into rainforest at Conscript Pass is one of the most beautiful and peaceful walks anywhere in the area. Turrumurra to De Burgh's Bridge is also good, varied bushland but with some badly weeded sections close to the river. One of the best bits of the whole valley is the stretch from the bridge to Fiddens Wharf.

This is where we are going on our late autumn walk on Sunday, 6th May.

If you have enjoyed Blue Mountains walks like the Undercliff and Overcliff Walks at Wentworth Falls, you will love this stretch. It features damp cliff faces, ferns, caves, overhangs and excellent lookout points. Not up to Blue Mountains scale, but much easier to get to. The weir at the Lane Cove River Park is about halfway. It took two and a half hours reasonably fast walking to get to this point. It was a good place for a break, a cappuccino and a raisin toast at the kiosk, and a call to my nearest and dearest to say that I was doing it really tough.



It was encouraging to see large numbers of fish milling around the area of the fish ladder. This is an artificial channel of rocky rapids to

entice migratory species, such as bass, to bypass the barrier of the artificial weir.

None of the fish were bass, they may have been mullet, bony bream or hardyhead. There were large schools of silvery fish about 15cms long above the weir. I don't know what they were but at least they were native, not goldfish.

The snack break certainly helped the steep climb up to Kobada Rocks above Delhi Rd., the only serious uphill section on the entire walk. This is where the tunnel for the proposed Parramatta to Chatswood Rail Link would exit and you can look straight along the proposed route to UTS.

It would be a tragedy if this fantastic rock platform were damaged for any rail link, and more of a pity if it were to be damaged for a shortened rail link from Epping only.

Beyond Kobada Rocks, the stretch from Quebec Rd. to Epping Rd. is one of the most interesting, taking in a fine river viewing point and the site of the old Fairyland pleasure grounds. There is an old photo of Fairyland featured on the new STEP map.

If you walk through to the west end of the site and turn left on an indistinct track towards the shore you can stand roughly on the spot from which that old photo was taken. It was an open meadow with buildings and a jetty then, now it is thickly vegetated with a mixture of natives, including tall wattles, and weeds.

Even more striking is the contrast between the lack of mangroves in the photo and the mangrove fringe today.

Beyond Fairyland the Great North Walk skirts the rear edge of the redeveloped CSIRO site known as Riverside Corporate Park. I was only down there six months ago but already a large steel, concrete and glass office building has reared up above the bushland and mangroves. I did not have time to check how

much bushland has been lost. A bushland walking track had previously been constructed by the developers and now it just seems to run up alongside a construction site safety fence.

The view from the Epping Road bridge and the high level footbridge over the starch factory is one of glitzy office and light industrial buildings rising above mangrove banks and bushland. Quite a shock! On reflection though, this type of development, if development cannot be avoided, is preferable to residential development, since the impact can be better managed by the site owners, and stray pets and garden weed escapes can be avoided. The walk continues though Magdala Park, one of a number of sports grounds on old landfill sites along the lower river.

You can refill your water bottle here.

From here onwards mangroves become the conspicuous backdrop to the walk.

These have increased along the Lane Cove River partly due to siltation from urban development.

Here at least is a native plant which has benefited from human impact, even though it has changed the nature of the river banks.



The mangroves were full of feeding ibis, and small fish and crabs could be seen.

The mangroves also trap a lot of rubbish; plastic bags and containers that have been thrown out of passing cars on the adjoining Pittwater Rd. float down the river. Boardwalks cross the the mangroves

at a number of places, the one near Sugarloaf Point being an exceptionally beautiful spot, where you descend from rocks to a bridge across the deep, clear water channel of Buffalo Creek. (Bill Jones has led a STEP walk along here some time ago).

Just beyond Buffalo Creek Reserve, at the boardwalk next to Plains Road, you are confronted with a big real estate sign. Surely the swampy sheoak fringe is not going to be built on? If so, I hope they suffer rising damp and mosquitoes, big-time!

Further down the shore, where the all-enveloping mangroves thin out, there is a wonderful scenic spot where a large sandstone boulder is perched on a ledge above sweeping views of the river.

Just past there the Northern Sewage Storage Tunnel crosses the river. Mangroves have totally colonised the tunnel causeway.

The massive concrete structure looming above the track has been brightened by graffiti "artists". But real artists would not scatter their empty spray cans through the bushland, would they?

From about this point onward the bushland is truly brightened up by the pink flowers of *Crowea saligna*, a plant we don't see in the upper valley but which seems to like a more coastal setting.

Boronia Park is next. This has a beautiful foreshore of cliffs and mangroves but the bushland is degraded and in need of rejuvenation by fire. This is a feature of many of the bushland reserves in the lower valley. The flora is often dominated by tall, straggly tick bush (*Kunzea ambigua*), a plant that in more fire prone areas regularly resprouts in low dense coppice form.

Boronia Park is pretty well the end of bushland on the walk.

Houses crowd down to the shoreline from here on.

You also have to walk on sealed surfaces, which is much more stressful on the legs and feet.

On passing Figtree Bridge there is

now an alternative route for the Great North Walk around the foreshore by Hunters Hill High School.

You can see why the State Government wants to close the school and sell it. As residential real estate it is worth tens of millions of dollars. And look at the standard of the temporary class rooms. No wonder enrolments have dropped. What a crying shame to see more overdeveloped foreshore here in the future!

The 4 km section from here to Valentia St. Ferry Wharf is a bonus if you are not too tired to enjoy it. There was obviously a limit of budget for Great North Walk signs, so you have to really concentrate on the route, something I am not so good at when I am tired.

The route takes you through quiet back lanes past heritage houses and churches. Very peaceful since there is no through traffic on the Woolwich Peninsula.

To an ex-Pom like me it is a reminder of some things which I miss about Europe; Australia's car-infested suburbs unfortunately do not provide many such quiet spots. The ferry at Valentia St. Wharf leaves at 7 minutes before the hour, except for 4 pm on weekdays, and at 13 minutes past even-numbered hours on Sundays. It is half an hour to Circular Quay. On the train home don't fall asleep and miss your station, as I did.



CRISIS IN BUSHLAND MANAGEMENT?

Ku-ring-gai Council is undergoing some financial belt-tightening and it

appears that this is reflected in the budgetary considerations of all its departments.

What concerns STEP is that budgetary constraints will affect the staffing available for bushland management activities.

Council is currently going through a policy formulation exercise intended to set broad directions, and budgetary constraints are obviously overshadowing the deliberations. Although we have at this time no clear picture of the likely effect on staffing levels, we are concerned that there will be a reduction of Council's commitment and capability to execute its bushland management responsibilities.

The likely loss of expertise and experience within Council's staff is an added and serious consequence. STEP believes that the time is ripe to revisit the proposal for a special environment levy (or call it bushland levy, if you will) to enable Ku-ring-gai to manage its bushland adequately and to return Ku-ring-gai to the pre-eminent position among Councils as a leader in the expertise, understanding and commitment to bushland management, which it has lost in recent times.

After all Ku-ring-gai has a proportionally greater area of bushland under its care than almost any other Council, and it is more endangered by fragmentation and perimeter effects. STEP has for a long time held the view that because of this greater privilege and responsibility, Ku-ring-gai has a strong case for the introduction of such a levy.

This was previously frustrated by State Government, but it is time to initiate another attempt.

State Governments have in the past used similar approaches, eg the 3x3 road levy (no, not a tax, never), and it is difficult to understand why local Government should not be able to adopt similar measures as the need arises.

If Council needs to raise such levies because of maladministration, then the normal democratic process can

be exercised at the following election, but STEP believes that the Ku-ring-gai community is ready for an environment levy, provided its expenditure is properly targetted and transparent in its implementation. Council's policy formulation will go through a further public participation step when the detailed policies will be placed on exhibition for public comment. STEP intends to review the situation at that stage, and we urge people to do likewise.



Map Update

Our sales of the new map have been going along very nicely. We have sold nearly one thousand copies, which boosts our confidence in doing future ventures of this kind, as well as adding to our coffers to make them possible.

F3 to M2 Link Road

As mentioned in the last Newsletter STEP is planning a project to gather and disseminate information about the transport and traffic issues which are currently besetting residential areas on the upper North Shore and beyond.

STEP is in negotiation with the NSW Nature Conservation Council regarding organisational assistance for this project.

A project officer will be engaged to research and assess options, which may be likely to be promoted by various vested interests, and to assemble basic information, which will be needed for STEP's response. A preliminary description of the capabilities of the project officer is: *The ideal appointee will have a strong commitment to the*

environment and some or all of the following attributes:

- * excellent writing, communication and public speaking skills,*
- * a sound knowledge of transport and environment issues*
- * an ability to undertake research and work without supervision,*
- * good organisational skills,*
- * experience with the media,*
- * lobbying and political campaigning skills,*
- * a commitment to the local community, and*
- * an ability to design and maintain a Web site.*

Any STEP member interested or who knows of a possible candidate, please contact Michelle on 9489 8972 or Bruno on 9449 1985, as a first expression of interest. Further information can then be provided.

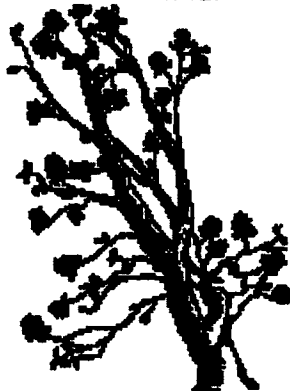
Pam Morse Grants

STEP will again make grants available from the Pam Morse Environment Fund.

This year we have invited area primary and secondary schools to apply for grants to support projects which educate the students or community about the values of urban bushland, or which aim to restore degraded habitat.

The amount available this year will be up to \$250.

The applications close on 30/04/01 and successful school applicants will be notified during May, 2001, to allow the grants to become effective during the second semester. For further information telephone Michelle on 9489 8972.



BOOK REVIEW

The Last Tasmanian Tiger by Robert Paddle, Cambridge University Press.

On first approach this book appears to be a comprehensive scientific work about the Thylacine. But the most interesting, in fact rivetting, part of the book is its description of the contemporary attitude and the political shenanigans which led inexorably to its extinction.

The myths of Thylacine predation of sheep and of vicious attacks on humans, which were used by a small but influential group of graziers to introduce a private bounty scheme in 1830, were not supported by any substantive evidence.

The political battles between scientific interests seeking protection for the Thylacine as an endangered species and those promoting its persecution, are an object lesson in how the public perception can be subverted to achieve a desired outcome. By the time a bounty was officially introduced by Parliament in 1888 it was difficult to find any Thylacines. The bounty was not revoked until 1909 by which time its extinction was assured.

The saddest part of the story is that because of cost cutting and official neglect at the zoo the last individual died as a result of extreme weather on 16th September 1936, together with a Bengal Tiger. After staff cutbacks there was only daytime staff who left at 5pm and did not bother to allow the carnivores back into their dens before locking up. Paddle's description of the politics is well constructed from contemporary media and Parliamentary documents. It should be compulsory reading for all secondary students as an example of political obfuscation and manipulation still practised today.

**STEP Website
is www.step.org.au**