



STEP Inc. Newsletter

Community Based Environmental Conservation Since 1978. No. 108 June 2001

COMING EVENTS

1. South Georgia Island -- A talk by **Angus Finney** on **Thursday 21st June**, at **7.45 pm** at the **St. Andrews Uniting Church Hall** at the corner of Vernon St. and Chisholm St., South Turramurra.

In 1999 three Australians and one Englishman made the first longitudinal traverse of South Georgia, the largest and most rugged of the sub-antarctic islands. Having chartered a yacht to get there, the party spent seven weeks on the island including just over thirty days on the traverse itself where they encountered challenging conditions, fearsome winds and spectacular scenery. Sydney-based adventurer Angus Finney was one of the four and will share his experiences with an illustrated talk of the expedition.

Located about 2000 kilometres east of Cape Horn, South Georgia is a glacier covered island about 180 kilometres long and between 7 and 40 kilometres wide. More than half the island is covered by permanent snow and ice and many of the more than 100 glaciers descend to sea level, however the coastal areas are a haven for wildlife. Wanderers, elephant seals, fur seals, Weddell and leopard seals and several species of penguins inhabit the shorelines.

Salisbury Plain on South Georgia harbours one of the largest king penguin rookeries in the world. South Georgia was claimed by Captain Cook for Britain in 1775, and Antarctic explorer Ernest Shackleton is buried there.

2. Nature Conservation Council of NSW Conference -- On **Thursday 21st June and Friday 22nd June** the NCC will host a conference at the Centenary Lecture Theatre at Royal North Shore Hospital. The topic for the conference is **"Bushland or Buildings? The Dilemma for Biodiversity Conservation in Urban Areas"**.

There will be 22 speakers drawn from politics, public service, academia, environment groups and professional consultancies who will deal with

*Legislation and Planning Issues,
Planning and Development Issues and
The Way Forward.*

For information contact Sue Newton on 9279 2466 or e-mail snewton@nccnsw.org.au

3. Morona Ave. Open Day -- On **Sunday 24th June**, there will be an open day for local residents and for anyone interested in the work being undertaken under an EPA grant. Representatives from NPWS will be there to provide information and there will be a walk through the site to explain the project and tea and biscuits will be provided. Meet at **2.00pm** at the corner of **Morona Ave. and Aleta Close, Wahroonga**.

4. Journey to the Heart of Nature -- On **Sunday 29th July**, at **2.00 pm** at the Ku-ring-gai Wildflower Garden **Val Close** will present this activity in environmental education. Val is the Bushland Education Coordinator at Ku-ring-gai Wildflower Garden, holds a Masters degree in Environmental Education and lectures at Macquarie University.

Val attended a two day seminar and workshop with a prominent environmental educator in the USA late last year and she came back virtually bursting with ideas on how to make environmental education more exciting and more interesting especially for the younger generation.

Starting with a walk she will focus attention on aspects of interest, to allow people to have direct experience and to share the inspirational values of bushland.

The event will finish with a cuppa and a slide show of images taken from the seminar.

Val is an inspirational speaker and this event promises to be an entertaining experience.

If you have not already booked, please contact Helen on 9144 2703 or e-mail at p.helmore@unsw.edu.au to make sure you don't miss out.

5. Spring Walk -- On **Sunday 23rd September**, Bill Jones will lead us on the Blue Gum Walk through the Berowra Valley. Mark it in your diary. More details in the next newsletter.

6. STEP Annual General Meeting -- Please set aside the evening of **Thursday 18th October, 2001**, for STEP's AGM. There will be a guest speaker following the formal part of the meeting. More details in future newsletters.

SEPP 5 --Housing for Older People and People with a Disability

We are all aware of the inappropriate developments which have been perpetrated in Ku-ring-gai by way of this State Planning policy.

Council and the community have been agitating to gain exemption from SEPP 5, not because the housing choice which it is intended to provide for older and disabled people, but because of the absence of local planning control.

The State Government has now undertaken a review of the impact of this policy and has prepared a draft guideline for exemption application. The draft guidelines set out the criteria which it is proposed will be applied in assessment of such an application by Council.

An application must be backed up by a report which covers:

- * a forecast of the housing needs of older people and people with a disability within the Council area for a 15 year period based on demographic data, recognising that the over 55 years age group can cover a life expectancy of 30 years and more and involve different levels of ability.

- * a survey of the current and likely future housing preferences of these target groups, including demand for retirement villages and other forms of accommodation providing access to specialised support services.

- * an analysis of the extent to which the existing housing stock and development controls within the Council area will meet the housing preferences of the target groups in appropriate locations, taking account of:

- the special needs of local residents on low and moderate incomes, and

- construction of new dwellings over the last 5 years by type and location to transport and services.

- * the amendments to controls necessary to provide adequate practical opportunity for developments where the local housing needs will not be met by existing controls and stock.

Ku-ring-gai Council has, together with other Councils, prepared a response to this draft.

The interpretation of the criteria is likely to provide a continuing problem in the current review as well as in the future implementation of the resulting changes.

Intel Young Scientist 2001--STEP Environmental Award for Best Environmental Project

STEP has aligned with Intel Young Scientist 2001 and is donating a prize of \$150 for Best Environmental Project, to encourage and reward research and education in environmental issues.

The competition is organised by the Science Teachers Association of NSW and is open to students from kindergarten to Year 12.

The prize will be awarded at a ceremony at the Powerhouse Museum on Friday, 19th October, 2001.

Watch this column and the STEP web site for a report on this project. For more details contact <http://sunsite.anu.deu.au/asta>

EPA Stormwater Grant Progress Report

We are now making substantial progress with the Fox Valley stormwater project.

The new Project Manager at Lane Cove National Park is Peter Draper, who has been making a big effort to facilitate the project.

A contract for construction has been let to Envirocivil, who have done similar works for NPWS previously. Four stilling basins will be constructed to reduce sediment and nutrient inputs to the creeks and ultimately the Lane Cove River. As well, weed will be removed and replaced with native plants. The regeneration work will be maintained by the Fox Valley Bushcare group.

An initial list of all plant species present has been compiled by Neroli and Harry Lock. Neroli and Michelle Leishman have also been collecting

water samples to test for total nitrogen, total phosphorus and suspended solids. The water samples are sent for analysis to Australian Water Technologies' laboratories at West Ryde. This will give us the baseline data so that we can assess the effectiveness of the stormwater mitigation works. Water samples will be collected throughout the year whenever there is significant rainfall.

(See Morona Ave Open Day)

Pam Morse Bequest Grants for 2001

This year the Committee decided to offer an award of up to \$500 to schools for projects concerned with environmental education or bushland habitat restoration.

We are happy to announce that we will be funding two local schools. Warrawee Public School will receive assistance to regenerate a native garden within the school grounds, in which Year 6 children will help each child in kindergarten to plant native seedlings and small shrubs. The money provided through the Pam Morse grant will pay for the plants and a sign that recognises the contribution of the participants. The planting will be done on a school Environment Day planned for 10th August, 2001.

A grant will also go to Turramurra Primary School to allow it to bring the Ku-ring-gai Bushland Education Puppet production "Privet the Weed" to the school as part of a program to educate students about bushland. The puppet show aims to use humour to spread the message "don't dump weeds in the bush!". We will also provide the school with some native plants for the children to plant in the school grounds.

STEP Web Site

The new STEP web site has finally arrived thanks to the efforts of Helen Wortham, Michelle Leishman and Chris Maxworthy. The address is www.step.org.au It is full of lots of information about STEP Inc. including its

history and achievements, current activities such as walks and talks, grants press releases etc. It also has down-loadable files of recent newsletters as well as membership and order forms for STEP publications. We hope that members will access the site regularly in order to keep up to date with our activities.

Late Autumn Bushwalk

John Martyn reports on the bushwalk from De Burgh's Bridge to Fiddens Wharf on 6th May:

In retrospect it probably wasn't a great idea to organise a bushwalk in May.

May in Sydney has, on average, the most rainy days, and a pretty heavy rainfall tally to boot (wellingtons of course).

And so it was, wet, wet, wet.

Sydney recorded its second wettest day of the year on Sunday 6th May with 94 mms.

However it stopped for the bushwalk -- well, almost. A few showers fell with the bonus of a rainbow or two, and that magic, clear golden light when the late afternoon sun breaks out from beneath the blue-black rainclouds. Monday, the day after was heaps worse, so we were lucky.

The walk started from Allen Park, West Killara, renamed Allen Wetlands for the day. Eight people turned up including one late comer who was almost defeated by Sydney's perennial problem of missing street signs.

We stopped briefly to examine the rock engravings just down the track from the park. No, I didn't say they were Aboriginal, but they gave all the appearances of Aboriginal art, except for the boomerang (a bit too obvious) and the initials (a bit out of character).

One of the main attractions of the walk is the Blue Mountains-like cliff line with moss, ferns, precipitous views to the Lane Cove River, and dampness. This stretch was very, very wet. Water was streaming in curtains down the rock faces and cascading from overhangs.

Project Officer Nature Conservation Council of NSW

Part time position.

The NCC of NSW is the peak umbrella group for the environmental groups of NSW. We are seeking to appoint a Project Officer to assess information and to plan, coordinate and implement publicity or other campaign strategies on transport and environmental issues in relation to the Federal Government's funding of an investigation into a link between the M2 Tollway and the F3 Freeway.

The project officer will report to a steering committee of the NCC. STEP will work closely with the project officer to achieve the optimal environmental outcome. 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 environmental issues; ability to undertake research and work without supervision; good organisational skills; experience with the media; lobbying and political campaigning skills; commitment to the local community and an ability to design and maintain a web site.

The position is part time (3 days per week) and available for up to 12 months. Flexibility in working arrangements is desirable.

Salary would be at the rate of \$129.27 per day plus superannuation. Applications must address the above selection criteria and be accompanied by a resume and contact details for three referees. Applications must be addressed to STEP Inc., PO Box 697, Turramurra, 2074, and lodged by 31st July, 2001.

More information from Bruno Krockenberger on 9449 1985, or Michelle Leishman on e-mail mleishman@ma.bio.mq.edu.au

I suspect it was largely runoff from Terrace Rd. So a normally scenic, slightly rough traverse on the Great North Walk came to resemble a caving expedition.

After we passed this section it was easy going, and should have been plain sailing for the rest of the walk, however, about 400 metres upstream from Fiddens Wharf a massive tree, a peppermint, I think, had crashed into the river gouging a gaping pit in the Great North Walk track with its roots. It could have been worse. The track had not gone quite completely, and it had certainly happened earlier that day. It could have crashed while we were passing. We managed to get everyone across the clay, boulders and broken roots without mishap. An astonishing amount of rubbish had built up in the river behind the part-submerged crown of the tree, mainly plastic bottles, plant debris and numerous bright green seed capsules of balloon vine.

I think there was a safety lesson there for future bushwalks.

Apart from fires, most trees come down in wet windy weather when the waterlogged soil destabilises the roots. Nobody in their right mind goes walking in a bushfire and now I believe there is a strong argument for staying at home in wet windy periods, even if the rain has stopped.

Catchment Management

It is a matter of concern that the State Government has seen fit to terminate the catchment management program, which was operating successfully for some years.

In particular the Hawkesbury Nepean Catchment and the Lane Cove River Catchment Management Committees performed valuable work.

The new approach in the Sydney Basin does not have effective grassroots participation and support and the effects of the demise of the previous, workable system is likely to be widespread and negative.

In this context Associate Professor

Shelley Burgin from the Centre for Integrated Catchment Management at the University of Western Sydney used the occasion of a talk given to Thornleigh Area Bushland Society to add her voice to the call to reinstate effective catchment management.

Her theme was freshwater turtles (or tortoises, or actually they should be more correctly called terrapins).

They are common in the Lane Cove catchment, favouring deeper pools. Unless you have made a point of approaching the water quietly you may never have seen one, since they are very reclusive.

They are also the forgotten and neglected vertebrates of the local ecosystem with very few studies having been made and published. They play an essential role as scavengers of carrion.

Professor Burgin confirmed that there are both long-necked and short-necked native species in our area, and there are unconfirmed reports of a third, an exotic aquarium escapee, called the red-eared slider, with North American origins.

This latter species has become established in the Hawkesbury catchment and may eventually outcompete the local species in the Sydney Basin. This is because it is more aggressive, and it can survive by feeding on vegetation when food supplies become scarce, whereas the native species are purely carnivorous and depend mainly on invertebrates and carrion.

Although the local freshwater turtles can reach great age nobody has actually studied their longevity any more than their other characteristics. Human or longer lifespans are possible.

Long-established land migration routes are in evidence at the UWS campus, since turtles frequently turn up, obviously following routes which were open to them before the campus was developed.

All turtles are vulnerable to foxes, who dig up their eggs.

The fox baiting program in the Lane Cove Valley is therefore welcome.

Biomass Electricity

The terminology suggests an environmentally friendly method of generation, which it can be if it is derived from agricultural waste (eg bagasse or animal manure) or municipal waste. Such applications are already in use as cogeneration plants and make use of materials which would otherwise just be wasted and would eventually enter the greenhouse gas balancesheet without yielding useable energy. However the use of forest waste has a more sinister aspect. If it were purely a matter of using residue from logging or from saw milling there could be little objection, except as a local pollution nuisance if not correctly handled.

The problem arises when the generators gear up to use such wood waste and they demand certainty and sufficient scale of supply.

This would inevitably lead to demand to increase logging and/or chipping for energy generation, and in turn pressure to get access to old growth forest to meet demand.

It is also an additional incentive to clear fell, to obtain this 'waste'. NCC, the Colong Foundation, the Wilderness Society and TEC are running a campaign to draw attention to the disinformation being spread by the energy industry, the forest industry and the Federal and State Governments.

Under recently passed Federal energy legislation, native forest waste is considered to be renewable resource. The NSW Government and the logging industry are promoting the use of forest waste. They see it as an opportunity to maintain or even increase wood chipping since the woodchip export market is being cornered by foreign producers. Environmentalists point out that 'forest waste' is actually a misnomer (some call it a lie) since it is part of the forest ecosystem, which maintains the habitat and conditions of the system. The term and the concept may apply in plantation forests but not in old growth forests.

State Forests have traditionally claimed that only 'waste' is used for woodchips. However the logging industry classifies all the following as waste:

- * Any trees not suitable for sawlogs,
- * Silvicultural trimmings (trees, big and small and undergrowth removed to promote sawlog growth),
- * Whole trees currently being used for woodchips.

As much as 90% of the trees logged in native forests are being classified as 'waste' and could therefore be used for energy generation.

The energy industry claims that firing wood enables them to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. This argument is based on a system of carbon accounting which only counts emissions from coal, not emissions from wood firing.

In fact wood is much less efficient in the transformation of carbon to energy than coal and produces much more greenhouse gas per unit of energy.

There is one large power generator currently trialling (at large scale) the substitution of 5% of coal with woodchips, and three power stations proposed to fire 280,000 tonnes each. These proposals would require in excess of 1,000,000 tonnes per annum, which far exceeds the current woodchip export level of 500,000 (information from CF leaflet).

This information, when distilled from the official rhetoric, point to a hidden agenda, which should ring alarm bells in the community.

SEDA has updated its Greenpower accreditation guidelines to require retailers to certify that native forest is not being used for biomass energy which is part of Greenpower.

This is a step in the right direction. The risk, as always, is that fine words can be used to disguise the objective of profit maximisation at the expense of the environment.

For more information and what you can do about it visit the website: www.colongwilderness.org.au/burni ng.html or phone 9299 7341.