



STEP Matters

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Diary Dates

- 29 Sept Wild river walk
(see below)
- 7 Oct AGM and talk on birds
in backyards
(see page 2)
- 15 Dec Christmas barbecue

Wild River Walk

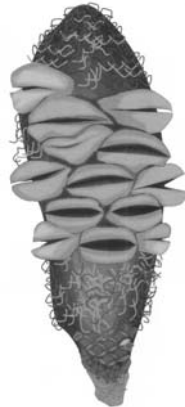
Date: Sunday 29 September
Time: 10 am
Meet: Acron Oval car park,
St Ives

We will explore Middle Harbour Track from the pipeline crossing to Cascades, a really wild place very close to home.

The walk is 7 km long and will take three to four hours. The grade is moderate to difficult and there is a long climb out. Bring a packed lunch as there are some beautiful picnic spots.

Contact John Martyn (9449 7962, johnmartyn@optushome.com.au) if you intend coming on the walk.

In the event of heavy rain the walk will be cancelled.



Wildflower Walk

On Sunday 25 August, a cloudy day with some light showers, about 28 people set out from Duffys Forest to a high point overlooking Cowan Creek and Apple Tree Bay. This is one of Sydney's best wildflower walks and the early spring flowers were out in force.

The early Boronias, *B. ledifolia* and *B. serrulata* (Native Rose) were prominent, along with the Pulteneas and Phyllotas. There were some outstanding patches of *Eriostemon australasius* and *Phebalium squamulosum* and a few early Waratahs. Scattered Hibbertias and small orchids added interest.

We were fortunate to have some knowledgeable people in the group and consequently were able to appreciate Native Currants (*Leptomeria acida*) and a delightful little blue-flowered climber, *Comesperma volubile* (Love Creeper).

Some Aboriginal rock carvings was inspected and afternoon tea was taken overlooking Apple Tree Bay, which was scenically enhanced by passing rain showers. Fortunately the showers stayed away from us and we returned to base after three and a half hours with everyone voting the trip a worthwhile and enjoyable experience.

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Annual General Meeting

Our AGM will be held at 7:45 pm on Monday 7 October at St Andrews Church Hall (corner of Vernon Street and Chisholm Street, South Turramurra). The short AGM will be followed by a talk on birds in our backyards.

Birds in Backyards

Dr Richard Major, a research scientist at the Australian Museum, works on biodiversity in the Museum's terrestrial ecology section. He has two main research interests, the breeding ecology of birds and the effect of habitat modification on animal populations and communities.

Dr Major is currently chair of the steering committee for Birds Australia's *Birds in Backyards* project and will be talking about the results of community bird surveys carried out in 2001 and 2002. He will talk about the species of birds found in Sydney gardens and how garden structure and composition influence the species present. He will also talk about the effect of providing food for birds and the relationships between Noisy Miners, Pied Currawongs and small birds.

Committee

Elections for the 2002–03 committee will be held at the AGM. Current members who have agreed to stand for re-election are Michelle Leishman (President), Neryle Sheldon (Secretary), Jennifer Schwarz, Helen Wortham, Neroli Lock, John Martyn, Tony Morrison and Bruno Krockenberger.

Our treasurer, Hugh Roberts, has indicated that he wishes to retire from the Committee.

Hugh has done a tremendous job of sorting out and computerising the treasurer's responsibilities. He has set it up to be able to handle a small business, as STEP's publication activities have become. He has organised our environmental trust fund to comply with the various, and often confusing,

requirements of the Government watchdog authorities, and has acted as public officer for STEP.

Hugh has also managed to compile the annual information for audit in a professional and comprehensive manner in order to keep our audit costs to a minimum. In addition Hugh has maintained our membership database.

In summary, Hugh has been at the business core of STEP's activities and in his quiet and unassuming way has kept the wheels turning and kept the Committee informed about matters financial.

Hugh has been treasurer since early 1996, i.e. for almost seven years, and STEP owes him a debt of gratitude for his sterling efforts. Thanks, Hugh!

With Hugh's help the Committee is now looking at ways of handling the diverse parts of the treasurer's job, so that the load can be carried by a number of committee members without compromising efficiency too much. We are also looking for a new treasurer to join the committee, and Hugh has agreed to be available for a couple of months to ensure a smooth transfer.

Membership Fees

In our June newsletter the issue of raising the membership fee was aired with the view of putting it to a vote at the AGM. If the move is approved, the increased fees would commence from July 2003, i.e. for the 2003–04 financial year.

As discussed previously, costs of printing and postage of newsletters, public liability insurance, web page maintenance and other recurrent costs have risen substantially since the last fee increase well over ten years ago.

In recent years the shortfall in revenue from membership fees to cover membership costs has been made up from map and field guide sales.

However, in order to be able to maintain our ability to pursue the constitutional objectives of STEP, we propose to increase membership fees.

We believe that this is reasonable, given that fees have been kept at the same level for more than ten years despite increasing costs, and that the fees are still set at a relatively low level and still provide good value for money.

The following resolution will therefore be proposed at the AGM for members to vote on:

That membership fees be set at the following levels from July 2003:

- family annual \$20
- single annual \$16
- life membership \$200

and that the concessionary fee be abolished.

The Committee recommends that you vote 'yes' to this proposal.

F3 to M2 Connection Study

In addition to our position paper on the F3/M2 link (which is on our web site) we have prepared a brochure to raise public awareness of the implications of the proposed connection. It is entitled *What Would a F3/M2 Link Road Really Mean?*

The brochure addresses a series of issues such as:

- Building roads — does it really provide relief?
- Would the link take traffic off Pennant Hills Road or the Pacific Highway?
- What about air pollution?
- What's the answer?

The brochure also gives information about induced traffic growth, the bias of past Government spending patterns against public transport and details of our position paper on the web.

The brochure will be distributed to provide background information prior to the public being asked to consider any options.

Harbour to Hawkesbury Walk

A report by John Martyn

Tired of just walking the dog round to the postbox? Want a challenging, all-day bushwalk in a local setting but not the Lane Cove Valley? You could try the route of the Harbour to Hawkesbury walking track in the Middle Harbour catchment. This will take you through some of the most spectacular scenery anywhere in the Sydney metropolitan area, but make sure you do it in dry weather.

I started at Acron Oval on Acron Road, St Ives. From here the firetrail drops gradually to The Cascades, a popular beauty spot where Middle Harbour Creek descends through a series of large pools and rocky rapids. It was 9.15 am, early July, and there was still ice on the puddles in the rocky river bed.

The deep valley section downstream from here is strikingly beautiful and wild, with shady pools and rocky rapids. The rather rough track wanders from rock ledges through sandy coachwood glades eventually reaching the water pipe crossing downstream from the start of the tidal section. This bridge is the only dry crossing of upper Middle Harbour Creek between Roseville Bridge and The Cascades (which is very wet anyway in wet weather) but apparently it is to be demolished for safety reasons! (Editor's note: The bridge was demolished in recent weeks.)

Try and avoid walking the next section on a high tide greater than 1.5 metres because the track strays into the edge of Middle Harbour Creek at several points. The tidal creek broadens though the water is very shallow. You will see schools of large mullet, especially in summer. If you pause to watch them, you may see them feed by diving, and sifting the silty bottom, then expelling jet trails of silt through their gills.

The track turns east into tributary Carroll Creek, also tidal with mangroves, saltmarsh and swamp sheoaks. The tidal limit is a waterfall. There is another, small, high waterfall in a dark coachwood glade behind you as you face the crossing at the top of the falls.

The track meanders back to the main river, climbing to a low sandstone cliff with spectacular views. Its quality improves until it becomes a firetrail and then a sealed road as you enter the picnic area at Roseville Bridge.

Beyond Roseville Bridge the track climbs sharply then follows the contour on an overgrown former roadway. Eventually you will reach a junction near a low cliff where a confusing array of tracks descends to and skirts Flat Rock Beach, one of the prettiest spots on Middle Harbour. Beyond the beach the route curves around into Bantry Bay past spectacular viewpoints and through particularly attractive bushland. The track quality has by now deteriorated somewhat.

The abandoned explosives magazine complex appears ahead but it is not accessible. Instead, the track follows the boundary fence and becomes narrow, overgrown and rough. Beyond the complex it rises and falls along the south side of the Bates Creek Valley, again becoming a firetrail, linked by a short narrow section to another firetrail near Cook Street, Forresterville.

From here it gets tough. The 60 m descent to Natural Bridge and the 80 m ascent to The Bluff are rough, narrow tracks, overgrown in places, and you will probably be quite tired by this stage having covered more than 16 km.

Natural Bridge is a massive sandstone bench spanning Main Creek and truly as its name implies. You are in an area burnt by bushfire in recent years and there are numerous scorched, broken banksia and sheoak saplings across the track.

The Bluff is a spectacular, exposed viewpoint looking right down Bantry Bay. The only way down currently is through a steep, narrow crevice to the left of the main lookout. If you are broad in build, you are going to have problems here. The track downhill is more like an erosion gully in places and you can lose it over bare sandstone outcrop if you are not concentrating. It eventually crosses two forks of a side creek, follows the hillside contour, then descends towards Bantry Bay Wharf. This section is in reasonable condition.

Bantry Bay Wharf is a pretty, grassy picnic spot. There is a steep ascent towards Seaforth Oval and then the track levels out through a hanging swamp before climbing to the oval car park on Wakehurst Parkway. There is a bus stop a short distance south. 169 goes to Wynyard and 133 goes to Manly. Either way gets you to the City and the North Shore Line home but 169 is quicker if you can catch one. Or maybe you can get on the mobile and, if you are feeling wealthy, order a cab, or even persuade a family member or friend to pick you up. If you are anything like me, you will be tired so don't go to sleep on the bus or train home.

Distance

20 to 22 km

Walking time

About 6 hours assuming stops for views and lunch

Grade

Starts out easy but the last 5 km is pretty tough

Facilities

You can top up with water at Roseville Bridge otherwise it is remote by Sydney metropolitan standards

Maps

Pymble and Frenchs Forest 1:10,000 sheets

Note

This walk will be covered in STEP's new Middle Harbour walking tracks map due out later next year!

Wonder of our Woodlands

The Australian Conservation Foundation recently published a supplement to its *Habitat* magazine, entitled *The Wonder of our Woodlands*. It provides some very interesting information about Australian woodlands ranging from the temperate through the sub-tropical savannah to the tropical savannah woodlands.

It details the characteristics, the diversity and the threats to these woodlands. Included is a short article headed *So long, and thanks for all the beef*, reminiscent of Douglas Adams' farewell from the dolphins controlling the universe. But this one is about Queensland's Brigalow Belt.

It starts with a quote from *Memoirs of the Queensland Museum* (1998) by JA Covacevich, PJ Cooper and KR McDonald:

The Brigalow Belt in Queensland is a fine example of how to diminish diversity: encourage clearing ... through taxation and other incentives; fail to secure in conservation reserves representatives of all vegetation types in the region; recognise late, after several species have become extinct or are in decline, that a major problem in maintaining diversity exists; and proceed with plans for further development.

It then goes on:

Queensland's Brigalow Belt stretches in a 350 km swathe from the NSW border north to Townsville, and is characterised by the *Acacia harpophylla*

(brigalow) woodlands. Only 2.2% of the area is protected in conservation reserves.

While grazing pressure, timber cutting, inappropriate fire regimes and exotic weeds (most notoriously the prickly pear) have all placed stress on the species and ecosystems of this region, the ball and chain is the major culprit. Clearing using large bulldozers harnessed together with a ship's anchor chain weighted by a giant steel ball has been a speciality of the region since the 1960s. Clearing continues at around 2000 square kilometres per year, every year.

This has resulted in the Brigalow Belt now having the largest number of threatened ecosystems of any Queensland bioregion (70 out of a total of 163 vegetation types are considered threatened), and some of Australia's most threatened woodland species. Included in the toll is the northern hairy-nosed wombat, which has been reduced to just 70 animals. Eighteen reptile species are considered at risk, including the pretty golden-tailed gecko and *Allans lerista* (a burrowing skink that may soon have the dubious distinction of being the first reptile extinction in Australia's history).

Expansion for beef farming is the main excuse for clearing. One of Australia's major companies is a major destroyer of vegetation. It owns the biggest cattle herd in Australia and holds permits to clear more than 100 000 hectares of bush

(equivalent to one-fifth of Australia's total annual clearing rate).

Most of this bush is said to be 'regrowth', or previously cleared vegetation. Regrowth bush can still have conservation values, however, and the impact of clearing 100 000 hectares on ground water tables, regional salinity and greenhouse gas pollution may be considerable. The great irony is that the company is also a major player in the insurance industry, which is struggling to limit the risks involved with global climate change.

Editors note:

Rational decisions at enterprise level frequently produce undesirable outcomes at macro level, but we can't blame Adam Smith, since in his era the 'invisible hand' did not have to contend with limits in environmental resources. We can refer to Adam Smith's view that capitalism (read corporate enterprise) needs to be reigned in when its extremes create undue inequities (read intergenerational inequities).

One for the Record Books

Committee member John Martyn recently spotted an Australian Brush Turkey (*Alectura lathamii*) in the Lane Cove Valley. Although common on parts of the Central Coast and Ku-ring-gai Chase, this is probably the first recorded sighting of the Brush Turkey in the Lane Cove Valley.



Australian Brush Turkey