



STEP Matters

Number 126, October 2004

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Diary Dates

26 Oct AGM and talk
14 Nov Map launch

Technology, History, Fences and the Future of the Australian Arid Zone

Date: Tuesday 26 October
Time: 7:45 pm
Place: St Andrews Church Hall
(Vernon Street, South
Turrumurra)
Contact: Michelle Leishman
(9469 8972)

Our AGM will be held on Tuesday 26 October (note the change of date). The AGM will probably take about 15 minutes, after which Dr John Pickard from Macquarie University will present a talk entitled *Which side of the fence are you on? Technology, history, fences and the future of the Australian arid zone*. The talk will look at the role of changing technology of stock management, investment and attitudes to arid zone management.

The relict network of private dingo fences in western Queensland is an example of technology used to maintain a sheep and wool industry in an area now devoted to cattle. Similar examples are the government-funded rabbit-proof fences of WA and NSW. All proved ineffective, and in any event were made redundant by myxomatosis in the 1950. Since then, the main Barrier Fence in WA has been reinvented to protect the agricultural zone from emus encroaching from the pastoral rangelands.

Conservation groups frequently suggest that riparian zones should be entirely fenced to prevent river-bank erosion, e.g. on the Darling River from Bourke to Wentworth. The logic of this suggestion is questionable, and it would be a logistical nightmare.

Ongoing research in WA looking at virtual fences (i.e. fences without the usual posts and wires) may allow such a fence, albeit in a technologically different form.

Finally, John will look at the future of Australia's arid zones and question whether the declining terms-of-trade justify any further public or private investment in new or replacement infrastructure such as fences. If the answer is 'no', then either the current management (and possibly land-uses) will eventually stop, or new technologies will be required.

Launch of New Maps of Walking Tracks

Date: Sunday 14 November
Time: 2.30 to 4.30 pm
Place: Visitors Centre, Ku-ring-gai
Wildflower Garden,
420 Mona Vale Road
RSVP: secretary@step.org.au or
9469 8972 by
5 November

The STEP committee is proud to be able to bring this project to fruition and we have great pleasure in announcing that Rob Lang, Chief Executive Officer of the Sydney Harbour Foreshores Authority, will launch our two new maps, *Walking Tracks in the Middle Harbour Valley and Northern Sydney Harbour Foreshore* on Sunday 14 November.

**STEP members are warmly
invited to attend the launch.
However numbers are limited
so book your place now!**

STEP Inc

Community-based Environmental Conservation since 1978
PO Box 697, Turrumurra, NSW 2074

The maps are the result of the intensive and extensive efforts of John Martyn as planner, draftsman, technical expert, team leader and coordinator, and his team of mappers, checkers, photographers and researchers, who devoted many hours of their time walking the tracks, locating them accurately in relation to contour lines and other features, and researching natural and historic details.

The only reward they sought was to have the map made available to fellow bushwalkers to enhance everyone's appreciation of Sydney's magnificent bush heritage.

The northern map covers Garigal National Park and Middle Harbour including the Willoughby Council area, whereas the southern map covers the foreshores from Lane Cove to North Head, including Middle Head, North Sydney, Mosman, Warringah and some of the Manly Council area.

Each map is available to members for \$15 and non-members for \$20. Order your copies today using the form at the bottom of page 3.

UTS Ku-ring-gai Campus

The current position relating to UTS Ku-ring-gai Campus was reported in our last newsletter. Since then STEP has responded to the rezoning application with a formal submission which may be viewed on our web site. The following is an abbreviated version of the submission.

STEP points out that from the rezoning application:

A reader could draw the inference that the Community Reference Group (CRG) was supportive of the rezoning proposal. Nothing could be further from the truth. The CRG opposed rezoning, as did Film Australia.

STEP opposes rezoning because it is no more than an opportunistic short-term financial measure which will have long-term undesirable environmental and social consequences. Specifically

STEP opposes the rezoning application because of:

- the loss of, and damage to, bushland that would occur;
- the loss of residential amenity through introduction of high density housing; and
- the continuing need for a university to serve the growing Northern Beaches, Hills District and North Shore areas.

The Ecology Report

The Ecology Report, which accompanies and supports the application, is flawed in various respects. The conclusion of the report states that the proposal will result in a 'relatively small removal of bushland' and 'improved management of threatening processes such as weeds, stormwater and feral animals'. STEP refutes this proposition. In particular:

- According to the report 14% of existing bushland will be removed for construction and 36% will be in the asset protection zone (where trees are thinned so there is a minimum of 2 m between canopies, and the understorey is removed and maintained by mowing). However these two losses total over 50% of the existing bushland ... and the report states that this is loss of 'minimal bushland from the site!'
 - The report glosses over the loss of 60% of a substantial remnant of poorly represented Heath-leaved Banksia/Scribbly Gum Closed Scrubland; and no assessment is made of the loss of Blue Gum, Blackbutt and Turpentine that are recognised by the report as 'uncommon in the Sydney region'.
 - The report uses emotive terms inappropriately. For example the report refers to the UTS bushland as a 'fragment' and states that 'weeds occur in varying densities throughout the site' so that an uninformed reader could get a picture of a weed-infested bushland area, when in fact much of the site contains no weeds. By using such phrases the report misleads by emphasising the negatives of the site and ignoring the beautiful aspects of the remaining bushland.
- The report plays down the importance of the loss of the parcel of bushland (4.6 ha) and there is no reference to the continual chipping away at the valley bushland by such projects and no reference to the fact that should such projects be approved, the whole valley will eventually be lost through the tyranny of small decisions.
- It is STEP's strong belief that the bushland of Ku-ring-gai is a valuable community resource and is one of the main reasons people choose to live in the area. Urban bushland can only retain its biodiversity values in the long term when it remains in relatively large and unfragmented pieces. In particular STEP believes that it is misleading of the report to justify the loss of individuals and habitat of threatened and vulnerable species on the basis that a 'relatively small area is affected'.
- The report examines several threatened species and argues that the loss of this bushland is not likely to be significant as other habitat is preserved within Lane Cove National Park. It is exactly this argument that has resulted in species becoming vulnerable or threatened, i.e. that the loss of small individual parcels of land are relatively unimportant. For example the loss of 40 of 78 individuals of the threatened plant *Darwinia biflora* is hardly a 'relatively small' impact.
 - The report argues that the potential impacts of the development can be avoided or mitigated. However 3 threatened plant species, 50 bird species, 30 reptile and amphibian species and many mammal species which have been identified as occurring on the site must be substantially impacted if more than half of the flora and fauna habitat is removed.
 - The report argues that adoption of appropriate management strategies would overcome the indirect effects of stormwater run-off, weed invasion and feral animals resulting from the proposed residential

development. STEP believes that this is highly unlikely. The report does not quote the authority to support statements such as 'the control of and management of weeds would be addressed within a Weed Management Plan' and 'stormwater measures will be incorporated into the development to ensure that there is no adverse effect upon the water quality'. In STEP's experience such statements are meaningless, since future behaviour of residents and authorities will not be governed by the words in this report. The management imperatives will be ignored by the residents just as they have been ignored by the UTS management in the past.

The report promotes the concept that modified bushland is still bushland. STEP refutes the notion that trees are bushland — anyone can plant a tree but bushland cannot be planted. Bushland is a complex array of flora, fauna and processes that has evolved over very long periods of time. This is what makes it valuable, this is what makes it unique to Australia and this is what the rezoning application sets out to destroy on over half the remaining natural area on the site.

Thanks Fred

As you can see, the format and delivery of our newsletter has been modified slightly. Principally we no longer use envelopes (unless we're mailing more than the newsletter to you). As a result we're saving time, money and trees!

Our thanks to Fred Langshaw (long-time STEP member and newsletter distributor for the Australian Plants Society North Shore Group's newsletter) who gave us valuable advice on how to do this.

Rezoning of B2 Corridor

Draft Local Environmental Plan 201 proposes rezoning the abandoned B2 road reservation in Wahroonga and South Turramurra to part Residential 2(c) and part Open Space 6(a).

The plan is on public exhibition at Ku-ring-gai Council, Gordon Library and Turramurra Library, and may also be downloaded from www.kmc.nsw.gov.au.

Written submissions are accepted until Friday 5 November.

Water-wise Garden

Would you like to be part of a group to look after and care for the Water-wise Garden at the corner of Eastern Road and Gilroy Road, Turramurra? We will meet on a monthly basis for a couple of hours. Contact Neroli Lock on 9489 5794 for more information.

Membership Renewal and Order Form

Use the form below:

- to renew your membership **(only do this if the year 04 is shown on the bottom of the address label overleaf)**
- to order our maps

Please complete the form, indicate any changes needed to the address label, and mail the completed form and payment (by cheque made payable to STEP Inc) to:

The Treasurer, Step Inc
PO Box 697, Turramurra
NSW 2074

	Unit cost	Number	Cost (\$)
Membership (only complete if 03–04 shown on address label overleaf)			
Single (per financial year)	\$16		
Family (per financial year)	\$20		
Life	\$200		
Field Guide to the Bushland of the Upper Lane Cove Valley	\$30		
Maps of Walking Tracks			
Lane Cove Valley			
STEP member	\$15		
Non-member	\$20		
Middle Harbour Valley. Sheets 1 and 2 Bungaroo and Roseville Bridge			
STEP member	\$15		
Non-member	\$20		
Middle Harbour Valley. Sheets 3 and 4 Northbridge and North Harbour			
STEP member	\$15		
Non-member	\$20		
Donation (donations of \$2 or more tax deductible)			
		Total cost	

Walk along Bobbin Head Track

As the walkers gathered at the entrance to Ku-ring-gai National Park at the end of Bobbin Head Road, there was much discussion about the transformation of the landscape into the mushrooming medium-density development adjacent to the park. We also wondered if the numerous residents avail themselves of the marvellous opportunities they have on their doorsteps for walking and enjoying the marvels of nature.

At the commencement of the walk the ever-typical urban encroachment of weeds into the bushland was most evident. However, it wasn't long before we were delighted to be walking through pristine bushland. Perhaps there is a window of opportunity for a new bushcare group to be formed with the dramatic increase in residences.

Birds calls were frequent initially and we were able, with Noela Jones' expertise, to identify the callers and even locate them, in some instances.

The first part of the walk was through typical sandstone ridge-top vegetation and we observed some 'vulnerable' species. This is a classification that falls between 'rare' and 'endangered'.

Darwinia biflora was growing along the track edge and was just developing buds. *Tetradthea glandulosa*, another small shrub, was difficult to locate, but we eventually discovered a couple of plants that displayed their small rose-purple four petalled flowers. *Eucalyptus squamosa*, commonly known as Scaly Bark, was another rare species that we observed. This is a small tree, restricted to the lateritic tops in the Sydney area.

A profusion of white flowering *Micromyrtus ciliata* lined the track edges. This is a small spreading shrub, which is a member of the Myrtaceae family and can be found on low damp sandstone heath. The white flowers, although tiny, are produced in vast quantities, and are a delightful sight. This plant would be a great one to have in your native garden.

Two species of *Boronia* were in full bloom, *B. pinnata* and *B. thujona*. These were tall growing shrubs that were laden with their pink flowers and were most spectacular.

As we walked along, Bill Jones, our walk leader, drew our attention to the vegetation changes that were occurring from sandstone heath to that of Duffys Forest. Woody Pears, *Xylomelum pyriforme*, a member of the Proteaceae family, and *Eucalyptus punctata* and *E. sieberi* were making appearances.

A passing walker going in the opposite direction, alerted us to the fact that two echidnas had been sighted, but we not lucky enough to see them. We did learn, though, that echidna sightings are more common at this time of year as there is a compelling reason for echidnas to be out and about as October is the peak mating season.

We reached a lookout point that provided a vista of woodland on distant ridges, so we took the opportunity to rest a while before beginning the return journey. This didn't take nearly as long as the walk out as everyone was looking forward to the traditional afternoon tea which was enjoyed overlooking the Sphinx.

This was a most enjoyable, interesting and informative stroll where walkers, led by the popular and 'high profile' Bill Jones, experienced a free show of the beauty and wonders of the bush during late spring.

Would you prefer to receive your newsletter by e-mail?
If so, please advise secretary@step.org.au



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