



# STEP Inc. Newsletter

Community Based Environmental Conservation Since 1978 No. 61 April 1993

## MOUNTAIN BIKES IN BUSHLAND

Our small article in the last newsletter created interest. The article was a little misleading in that we did not mean to imply that STEP was considering opposing all use of bikes in bushland. We regard the normal use of bikes, whether it be children messing around or adults commuting to work, as an excellent use of those tracks which are suitable. Some members wrote to us -- Doug Edwards said in his letter,

*"..... I beg you not to stop or even oppose the transportation use of mountain bikes on trails.*

*However if you are opposed to the high energy high speed sport of mountain bike riding then yes I am too. A sport needs to be conducted in a safe place protected from risk to others and the environment. Competitive use of bushland for mountain bike racing is totally opposed by me. Please in your response to Council do oppose the sport but not the genuine transportation use for commuting and recreation through this glorious bushland by pushbike."*

Another member, Michael Swain, said.

*"..... the fire trails within the bushland constitute one of the few areas where one may ride a bicycle safely within the Ku-ring-gai Municipality. The roads within the South Turramurra - West Pymble area, particularly the former, are unsuitable for cyclists because of the extreme speeds of cars and narrow roads which are not provided with a shoulder.*

*.....the environmental impact of mountain bikes on the fire and foot trails within the park verge on negligible. ....One would perhaps hope that a commercial operator could bring more pressure to bear on the Council, Water Board, Pacific Power, Fire Brigade and National Park to adequately maintain existing fire trails rather than the pathetic attitude which currently persists.*

*Finally, may I suggest that STEP considers a code of conduct for mountain bike riders in the park similar to that currently operating in the USA. The essential themes of such a code are that mountain bike riders are fair and reasonable members of the community, that walkers have the right of way and that bike riders must always be in complete control of their bicycle."*

The report considered by Ku-ring-gai Council draws heavily on the North American experience and the issues of environmental degradation, user conflicts and access to public land have been considered. Our fears relate to the desirability of commercial operators and to the possible enormous increase in bicycle traffic once the Ku-ring-gai tracks, judged suitable for mountain bikes, become advertised through the specialist magazines.

The matter of the high energy aspect of mountain bike riding as a sport arises from the ability of these bikes to handle very rugged country at very high speed. They are potentially more dangerous than motorised bikes because they are so silent. The young and enthusiastic perform amazing feats on mountain bikes which are a danger to other users of the tracks.

There is no risk of bikes, as now used, being banned from bushland. The question is whether mountain bike use should be actively promoted.

## BUSHLAND REHABILITATION PLAN

Ku-ring-gai Council has produced a five year Bushland Rehabilitation Plan which the Bushland Management Working Party has agreed be adopted as an interim plan. It is likely that amendments will be made to it before the interim label is lifted.

A basic problem is that Council's commitment to bushland rehabilitation is still only six people in the field. This has not increased for many years and is really quite a pathetic contribution to the management of over a thousand hectares of urban bushland. (Other field staff are involved in fulfilling Council's statutory obligations in fire hazard reduction).

The Plan is characterised by an empirical method of determining conservation priorities and allocating the scarce resources. It has not fully come to grips with the need for follow up work in previously regenerated areas, however, or how to integrate the 600 volunteers from the Bushcare programme into an overall strategy.

It is particularly important that all the work done in previous years under different management regimes is not lost because there is now a different emphasis.

The whole business is a dynamic one of course and the encouraging part is the enthusiasm of the professional staff for coming to grips with the management problems they face.

## **WILDFLOWER GARDEN WETLAND**

Ku-ring-gai Council obtained a grant for the construction of a wetland with associated boardwalk and interpretative facilities within the Wildflower Garden at St Ives. The wetland will be formed by extending an existing formed pond which is next to a hanging swamp. The general aim is commendable as community education is a primary long term path to conservation of urban bushland.

STEP opposes the proposal in its current form, however, because Council has not established that the works will not damage the adjacent hanging swamp, that it will not damage rare or endangered species, that there will be adequate water flow to support the wetland without recourse to the mains supply and that the educational objectives cannot be met by modification to the existing ponds. Council has not produced species lists for affected flora and fauna or done any hydrological assessment.

The issue runs the risk of being caught up in the factional fracas within Council and its determination judged by who is for or against it rather than by the real worth of the proposal. STEP's opinion is that Council hasn't done its homework on this one and that it is better to relinquish the grant pending proper assessment of environmental factors than to plough ahead simply to keep the money.

## **BUSHLAND MANAGEMENT WORKING PARTY**

The Bushland Management Working Party was formed in 1981 to advise Ku-ring-gai Council on the management of the bushland under its care and control and has been effective in bringing a revolution in bushland management to the Municipality.

Following advertisements for membership of the Working Party a new committee has been appointed which may well be one of the best we have had. Only three of the original members remain, Janet Fairlie-Cuninghame (representing Kubes), Harley Wright (community representative) and John Burke (representing STEP). Medium term members are Jane Gye (community representative), Frank Burroughs (Macquarie University), Peter Keane (Water Board) and our current Chairman Bob Conroy from National Parks and Wildlife. New committee members are Emma Doyle, David McNaughton and Nancy Pallin who are all involved in the Bushcare programme, Peter Wem from Water Resources and Stephen Wearing from UTS who is an expert in natural resources.

The Working Party is a means by which any STEP member can have an input on policy by contacting John Burke on any issue of concern.

## **STEP TRACK OPENING**

Ku-ring-gai Council successfully applied for a grant to upgrade what has been known for many years now as the STEP Track. This is part of Ku-ring-gai's efforts to develop a system of high quality walking tracks throughout the Municipality. Tracks completed previously are Bungaroo, Two Creeks, Browns Field and Darri. Brochures on each are available from Council.

The STEP Track originated when some of the early STEP activists such as the Catfords, the Booths and Helen Petersen decided that a walking track should be made in South Turrumurra which showed more of the diversity of the bushland. Council's efforts have upgraded that track and provided signposting etc.

On April 3rd over 100 people gathered at the end of Kingsford Ave to attend the official opening by the Mayor Peter Derwent. We were pleased to also welcome Aldermen Elaine Malicki and Robert Pallin as well as representatives from a wide section of the community. A guided walk around the track followed.

There is no doubt that this track is a very worthwhile addition to our bushland resources and we urge any STEP member who missed the opening to find an opportunity for the walk. (Ring us for preprint of the STEP Track section of our upcoming publication A Field Guide to the Upper Lane Cove Valley if you really want to appreciate and learn about this area.)

Our thanks to Rosemary Pollock, Paul Bateson and Jonathon Howard from Council who worked so hard on the day and to all at Council associated with the planning and construction of the track.

## **WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY - 5th JUNE**

**On 5th June STEP will help the Lane Cove Valley Canoe Club, the LCV Total Catchment Management Committee and National Parks draw attention to the plight of the Valley. If you have a canoe join the mass canoe paddle starting at 11 am at the wier at Lane Cove National Park off Lady Game Drive - for information Alan Jones 449-4718.**

**There will be displays and bushwalks at the park from 10 am to 4 pm. and those wishing to join the canoeists for a barbeque lunch can walk from the Field of Mars via the mangrove boardwalk to Sugarloaf - return to the park about 3 pm. This is an opportunity to learn about the problems of this catchment and the solutions as well as having a great day.**



## THE BROADWAY HISTORIC PARK

We reported in Newsletter 54 of Nov 91 that the ridgetop area along the Broadway at Wahroonga was threatened by a medium density proposal which would have degraded the bushland below it and in turn been threatened by a high fire danger.

STEP and other interested parties made various submissions and on 12 May 1992 Council resolved that the land should be preserved as a historic park for both its built and natural values. A committee was formed consisting of local residents, Ward Alderman Elaine Malicki, Council staff representatives and a STEP representative. This committee has functioned very effectively and includes amongst its achievements the acquisition of \$25,000 in funding, research into the historic Telford road pavement and fortnightly bush regeneration working sessions. A landscape plan will go on exhibition in the local area soon and then construction work will commence. This will involve a small parking area, bollards to keep control traffic, paths, picnic area etc.

While there are some whose value system will not allow them to appreciate that a natural park will be of more benefit than a row of townhouses there is general agreement that the wishes of the local community should prevail. This project is therefore an excellent example of a small community having successful input into the way in which it develops.

If you are interested in looking at the Telford pavement there is an excellent section on Muttama St which can be reached from the trail at the corner of The Broadway and Leuna Ave. If you are interested in helping with the project or finding out more about it contact Neroli Lock on 489 5794.

## THE WARRINGAH FREEWAY REVISITED

The Sydney Morning Herald carried an article on 2nd April saying that the NSW Government would call for expressions of interest for the construction of "...the extension of the Warringah Freeway from Manly to Naremburn." This is unbelievable stuff and a perfect example of how each environmental battle is having to be fought over and over again until it is either lost or won in a permanent manner. (An example of the latter is having land protected by being put within a Park or otherwise locked up.)

In April 1983 Mr D S Kirby handed down the Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Warringah Transport Corridor. This is a 400 page document which recommended, inter alia, "against the reinstatement of the corridor" and for the preservation of the Castlecrag escarpment. The Government's inquiry found that the proposed freeway would not solve congestion problems but now, after a decent period of ten years, there is no doubt that we are going to have to go over all the issues again. At least Kirby has done better than Woodward whose July 1990 report recommending against the F-2 Freeway was dismissed by the Government as soon as it was published.

Commissioner Kirby pointed out that building the freeway would mean that another 80,000 people would be housed in a more "developed" Warringah and that these people, along with the existing population, would cause more congestion than now exists. **In other words so long as we allow the effectiveness of new infrastructure to be destroyed by the demographic changes which it causes then these grand plans are doomed to failure.** While we refuse to consider population limits for Sydney we will be frustrated in efforts to provide adequate services.

## CLEAN UP AUSTRALIA DAY

Sunday March 7 was wet but a lot of cleaning up was still done. At the new section of Garrigal National Park volunteers including a local four wheel drive club, Kubes, STEP and local residents as well as National Parks staff tackled a huge job. A trail in from Forest Way has obviously been a local informal tip for years. The garbage was dominated by hundreds of tyres and heaps of building materials. The views from this trail are spectacular and no doubt policing by National Parks will reduce future dumping.

Another group of STEP members and a few locals tackled a less pristine but very valuable site in the Lane Cove Valley near Macquarie shopping centre. The surprisingly spectacular Buckham Falls had carried enormous quantities of rubbish including packaging, shopping trolleys, plastic, pallets and the like. The easy bit was picking up the rubbish, the hard bit was getting it back up the steep climb to the collection area.

Many thanks to all volunteers but especially to John and Isolde Martyn who organised and supervised the second site.

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## OVALS

You may have noticed that our playing fields are very often adjacent to bushland and that there are often severe weed infestations around the edges. These infestations are almost always on the low side while the high side above any oval is often weed free.

The causes are now well understood and relate to the disturbance that the bush has undergone. This disturbance arises from three main causes, all of which affect the low side. The first is the use of fill to form the playing surface. At the low edges

this covers the bush in a high nutrient fill which favours weeds over natives. The second is the fertiliser used on the field which runs off, during rain and watering, always towards the low side. This increases the nutrient content of the soil which, once again, favours weeds at the expense of natives. The third is the altered water regime which causes the bush below the oval to be far wetter because of the watering of the oval and this again favours weeds.

Unless something is done to correct these factors then the nutrients will move downhill over time and eventually poison the whole slope below the field.

There are remedies but like so many things they are far more difficult to effect afterwards than if the job had been done properly in the first place. The answers lie in collecting all the runoff from the ovals and directing it directly to a watercourse, in monitoring


fertiliser use and using the smallest amount possible, and in installing impervious cutoff retaining walls to separate hostile fill from the bushland soils.

STEP has just made a submission to Ku-ring-gai Council through the Bushland Management Working Party and we hope to see a report from the Council Engineer on feasible methods of rectifying these problems.

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## DIARY REMINDER

<b>Thursday 20th May</b>	<b>Talk on native orchids by David Macalpine. Organised by Kubes, Baptist Church Hall, Gordon, 7.45 pm. For information 498 6052</b>
<b>Sunday 23rd May</b>	<b>Bird bushwalk, meet at 8am at Acron Oval St Ives. Bring drinks and binoculars. Organised by Kubes. For information 498 6052</b>
<b>Sunday 30th May</b>	<b>Choice of 2 bushwalks organised by Beecroft Cheltenham Civic Trust. Meet corner York St and Chilworth Close, Beecroft at 2 pm Afternoon tea. Contact 484 6764</b>
<b>Saturday 5th June</b>	<b>World Environment Day. Displays and walks at Lane Cove National Park 10 am to 4 pm. Canoe Paddle (bring your own canoe) 11 am at wier. For information Jeff Johnson at National Park or, regarding canoeing, Alan Jones on 449 4178. Come and demonstrate your concern about this catchment.</b>
<b>Thursday 24th June</b>	<b>Talk on fungi of the Sydney region by Harold Spies. More in the next newsletter</b>
<b>Sunday 11th July</b>	<b>Population Impact Awareness Day. First Fleet Park, Circular Quay</b>