



STEP Inc. Newsletter

Community Based Environmental Conservation Since 1978. No. 78 April 1996

COMING EVENTS

AUTUMN BUSHWALK

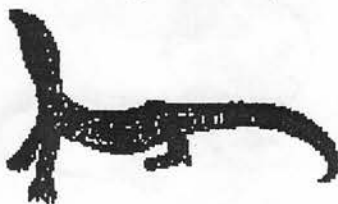
Our Autumn Bushwalk will take us to Browns Field, Wahroonga, for a look at the vegetation and geology of this unique urban bushland site. Andrew Jennings will lead the walk and will share his extensive knowledge of the vegetation with us. John Martyn will unfortunately be interstate on the day, but he has provided Andrew with some details of the geology of the area, to tie in with the information, which Dr. Lin Sutherland presented in his talk "Old Volcanoes around Sydney" (see report this page).

Meet at 2.00pm, 28th April, at the entrance to Browns Field Oval, Campbell Dr. Wahroonga.

COMPUTERS AND THE ENVIRONMENT -- An illustrated talk and practical demonstration by STEP committee member, Dr. Andrew Skidmore, at 8.00pm on Wednesday 15th May, at St. Andrews Church Hall, Vernon St., South Turramurra. Andrew was one of the speakers at the recent conference "Ecology at the Cutting Edge", dealing with digital Geographic Information Systems (GIS) (see report of conference in last issue).

CLEAN UP AUSTRALIA

Because no particular patch was identified as deserving of special attention, the STEP site was set up at a central and visible location at the corner of Kissing Point Rd. and Vernon St., volunteers being despatched from there to various locations. The weather was fine and a record number of volunteers (54) turned out and collected 40 bags and numerous large items. Numerous patches of bush, bushland fringes and road verges were cleaned up in the process, and the rubbish brought back to the collection site. As usual the creek lines along Terry's Creek and the Lane Cove needed attention, but by far the worst was the embankment along the bushland side of the Comenarra Parkway from South Turramurra to Fox Valley Rd. It still is, even after the clean up. Next year we will probably organise a similar widespread exercise to "clean up South Turramurra", with special attention to these badly littered sites. For this year we thank all those who participated in this most successful day. *John Martyn.*



OLD VOLCANOES AROUND SYDNEY

"Will they erupt again?" was one of the questions posed by Dr. Lin Sutherland, of the Australian Museum, while he had his STEP audience on the edge of their seats. Eastern Australia, he said, is a very volcanic area: we just happen to be living in a quiet period of time, but the Aborigines have stories of volcanoes in action.

He showed us photos of the lowest remnant of a volcanic pipe, located in the Hornsby quarry, where molten material from hundreds of kilometres below surged to the surface some time in the Jurassic Period. At that time Australia was still joined to India and Antarctica as Gondwanaland, and the pipe would have originally extended upwards through another kilometre of rock, which has since been eroded through the 160 or so million intervening years.

Other local evidence shown in Lin Sutherland's presentation included the characteristic etchings of a volcanic dyke in an outcrop of rock near De Burgh's Bridge, and a lava channel in the rock face at Pymble's Bicentennial Park.

About 64 million years ago, after Australia had cast off the Indian subcontinent and was shedding Antarctica, a second phase of

volcanism occurred.

But the volcanic activity is not all as remote in time, and a midden site at Balmoral Beach showed volcanic pumice traces, as evidenced in one of his photos. This midden is dated between 3000 and 1800 years ago, which is minuscule in geological terms. However, it is not clear whether this pumice originated in Australia, or elsewhere in the Pacific region.

Dr. Sutherland then proceeded to answer his own question by presenting a scenario, which he based on the latest research: as Australia slowly drifts in a northerly direction, it has positioned the Sydney basin over a "hot spot", over which volcanic activity has occurred previously. Therefore it is indeed likely to erupt again, some time, expressed in geological terms. He showed diagrams of what would happen if lava flow erupted from, say, Kurrajong Heights, spreading through the Grose Valley, down to Penrith and further....

Then he sent us home to contemplate this scenario.

University of NSW Press recently published his book "Volcanic Earth" which contains more fascinating details.

We thank Dr. Sutherland for his interesting and informative talk.

Hugh Roberts.

THE ENVIRONMENT OF KU-RING-GAI: THE NEXT FOUR YEARS

The following is a precis of a position paper prepared by the STEP committee.

*** STEP is a Ku-ring-gai based environment group and wishes to put before Council and the wider community its position on a range of issues.

Basic to our approach is the need to put planning into a long term time frame. Rather than looking at effects of a policy over a month or a year or an electoral term we hope that Council and the community will increasingly look at effects over decades ahead and beyond.

The management of bushland in the municipality is in new hands with the recent changes in management at Council and we expect that this will provide the additional impetus to complete the job of producing and implementing policies.

Uncapped population growth would ensure continuing degradation of our environment and we argue for no additional growth other than to correct any imbalance in housing types for our current population. Mona Vale Rd. is an example where we can clearly see the progress of urban degradation by commercial and other forces. This bushland corridor will be a commercial strip development within decades unless we stop the process now.

Australian landscapes differentiate us from the rest of the world. We propose Australian concepts to replace foreign streetscapes.

The community now appreciates that more roads often mean more rather than less congestion because they promote behavioural and demographic changes. There is a need to promote debate on this issue and to reach for solutions which preclude unrewarded degradation of our urban environment.

Waste management improvements may have gone as far as possible without making households more accountable. A user pays system is advocated. ***

ST. IVES TREE LOPPINGS SITE

The last Newsletter contained a very matter-of-fact report that the NP&WS had refused to incorporate the former tree loppings site into Garigal NP.

It should be noted that STEP has long held the view, that this site should not be developed for industrial or similar uses, neither for Council nor private enterprise recycling activities.

It is not appropriate to add to the current problems of leachate control with further run-off, noise and visual pollution.

STEP has consistently maintained that the Mona Vale Rd. corridor should be kept in its undeveloped state to prevent degradation of the bushland in the Ku-ring-gai Chase and Garigal National Parks downstream from the ridgetop corridor. It should be kept as a green link between these two important National Parks.

NATIVE FORESTS AND WOODCHIPPING

The debate about woodchipping and old growth forests usually generates more heat than light. Environmentalists are certain that the remnant old growth forests should not be logged, neither for sawlogs nor for woodchips, so that biodiversity and intrinsic values can be maintained.

We have become accustomed to hear from the Forest Industry side that thousands of jobs would go and that billions of dollars worth of exports would be lost, if logging of old growth forest were stopped.

A recent letter from an Economic Consultant, Judith Clark, to the Australian Financial Review sets out some interesting data:

"Plantations supply two-thirds of the wood for Australia's production of sawn timber, panels and pulp. Companies processing plantation wood account for most of our \$10 billion turnover in the industry -- exporters of native forest woodchips account for only 3 percent." "The plantation-based sector further

processes 80 percent of the wood it harvests into sawn timber, panels and pulp in Australia. It..... employs 30000 people. It has excellent prospects for expansion and increased job generation.... By contrast the native-forest-based industry is characterised by relatively low levels of investment, declining manufacturing production, and declining employment. Despite years of Government support, less than 50% of the logged wood from native forests is processed in Australia. Half is exported as woodchips."

(It appears that all the heat is about vested interests in a small sunset sector of the forest industry. It must be acknowledged, of course, that the problems for the people directly affected by changes must be addressed. Does anyone have contrary information or views? Ed.)

CLEAN AIR 2000

Following a recent advertisement by NRMA advocate Rod McGeoch, calling for changes of travel habits in order to combat Sydney's increasing traffic gridlock and air pollution problems, STEP sent a Votergram to all State Parliamentarians to support this initiative and to urge action on improving public transport access, frequency and comfort.

We have received positive responses from a large majority of Parliamentarians, of all parties.

It appears that the idea is catching on, and there is progress. The Clean Air 2000 Task Force has now issued a discussion paper entitled "Shaping Sydney's Transport -- a framework for reform" for public comment by 10th May.



ESD, IGE AND THE PP

Our modern propensity to talk in riddles, or at least in acronyms, gives rise to headlines like the above.

ESD (short for Ecologically Sustainable Development) is a current buzz word, which is freely traded about, but not always with a clear understanding of its implications. Furthermore it is now also being used as a smokescreen for business-as-usual.

The concept of ESD is clearly and intimately linked with Intergenerational Equity (IGE) and the Precautionary Principle (PP).

IGE can be defined as follows:

Each generation is both a trustee of the planet for future generations and a beneficiary of the previous generation's stewardship.

This implies that the present generation should ensure that health, diversity and productivity of the environment is maintained or enhanced for the benefit of future generations.

The Precautionary Principle can be stated as follows:

Where there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation.

Both IGE and PP have very widespread and far-reaching implications for all our actions in everyday life, however they are of critical importance when it comes to development decisions.

Developments are proposed for the purpose of providing benefits, the question being how these benefits are divided between the current generation and future generations, and especially whether the effect on future generations is detrimental. The argument is usually that the wealth produced for this generation is passed on to the next generation as a capital asset.

However if the development uses irreplaceable resources, there is a negative effect, which may not be able to be offset by the created asset. The secondary question of who the winners and the losers in the present generation are (ie. intragenerational equity), is generally more adequately handled by our institutions and political system.

The concept of Ecologically Sustainable Development, if it is to be pursued effectively, requires that the way we look at Gross Domestic Product (GDP) also needs to be changed. GDP currently is a measure of money changing hands in the National Economy, and makes no distinction between the desirable and the undesirable, the costs and the gains. If this is compounded with the culture of economic growth all the incentives are set against ESD. This has been recognised, but not yet brought into effect.

A small step forward has been taken at Government level, which now has to report on the state of the natural heritage under its control, and on the state of its infrastructure assets.

When it comes to development proposals, which affect the remaining urban bushland, STEP views these remnants as irreplaceable natural resources, which future generations would prefer to have preserved.

STEP REPRESENTATION
Ku-ring-gai Council has accepted STEP's nominee for the Residents Environmental Advisory Committee (KREAC) and its terms of reference have been defined. The Principle Reference will be: *To provide advice to Council and to its officers on all matters to do with the built environment of the residential areas in the Municipality. It will also further understanding and cooperation between all parties, involved in the management (and development) of residential areas, both within Council and in the Community.*

DIARY NOTES

The following list of coming events may be of interest:

29/04 to 1/05/96 Ku-ring-gai Schools and Community

Environmental Resources Field Days at K.Town Hall. (498 0792)

5/05/96 ACF's State Forum/BYO Picnic and Tour of "Conserver Lifestyle" Education Site at Pigface Point, Georges River at 10.30 am. (528 6091)

7/05/96 S.G.A.P. conducted walk in the Ku-ring-gai Wildflower Garden, 420 Mona Vale Rd., at 10.00 am, looking at Hakeas and other Proteaceae (484 2106)

10/05/96 S.G.A.P. meeting and talk by Danie Ondinea on

"Attracting Wildlife to Gardens", at Willow Park Community Centre Hall, 25 Edgeworth David Ave., Hornsby, at 8.00 pm (484 2106)

14/05/96 S.G.A.P. conducted walk in the KWG "Parts of the Plant II - the Fruits" (484 2106)

20/05/96 ACF Public Meeting "Ecologically Sustainable Growth: Myth, Mirage or Mandate?" at Hallstrom Theatre, Aust. Museum at 7.00 pm. (528 6091)

21/05/96 S.G.A.P. conducted walk in the KWG "Identifying Trees in the KWG" (484 2106)

26/05 to 30/05/96 Concurrent 3rd National Hazardous and Solid Waste Convention and Trade Exhibition, and Best Practice Waste Management - Does Not Cost The Earth, at Darling Harbour. Aust Water & Wastewater Ass. (413 1288)

28/05/96 S.G.A.P. conducted walk in the KWG "Aboriginal Use of Australian Plants"

2/06 to 8/06/96 National Public Transport Week: Public Transport Derby and other activities arranged by ACF/LinkUp (247 4285)

2/06/96 TEC's Lake Macquarie Cruise on the Wangi Queen with Environmentalist Doug Lithgow. TEC (247 4714)

4/06/96 S.G.A.P. walk "Ferns"
14/06/96 S.G.A.P. talk by Ken Hill on "Australian Conifers".

BOOK REVIEW - FASHIONING AUSTRALIA'S FORESTS by John Dargavel, Oxford University Press

If you have been confused by the debate about Australia's forests and logging, then this book is a must, to put you in the picture. The author gives an overview of the patterns of Australia's forests in the introduction, giving a definition and setting out the major types, and showing the evolution of ideas and ideals of conservation and preservation. The book is then divided into four sections: Fashioning (1850's to 1960's), Changing (1970's to 1980's), Contesting (from the 1970's) and Creating (1990's and beyond). He describes the emergence of the Forest Service. Progress was slow until in 1920, Britain conceived of the idea that "*.....sylvan resources of the Empire ...be scientifically conserved and prudently exploited for the mutual benefit of the British Commonwealth of Nations*". Reservation of State forests was slow and the foresters always saw the areas outside the Crown land forests as part of their long term resources. Later efforts to preserve were seen as unwarranted outside interference. There is a wealth of statistics and detail in the section "Changing" on every aspect of forestry. It is followed by chapters on the ecology, types and species, on economic and regional issues, and on politico /bureaucratic processes. The last chapter "Creating" canvasses the problems to be resolved, the ideas for resolving them, and puts them into context in terms of what is politically and socially possible. The book opens and closes with a quotation from Baron von Mueller (1879) "*...Let us regard the forests as a gift, entrusted to any of us only for transient care, to be surrendered to posterity as an unimpaired property, increased in richesto pass as a sacred patrimony from generation to generation.*" If he got it right in 1879, why can't we get it right in 1996?

SENDER
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TAILENDERS

** We don't know who said it, but here is what was said:

*"If we live as if it matters and it doesn't matter, then it doesn't matter,
If we live as if it doesn't matter, and it does matter, then it matters".*

quoted from BIOLINKS.

** But we do know that Emeritus Professor Charles Birch said this:

*"...the rich must live more simply that the poor may simply live....
Economic rationalism must fly out the window to let ecological realism in".*

quoted from Charles Birch, *Confronting the Future. Australia and the World.* 1st ed.

MILO DUNPHY Together with the rest of the environment movement we mourn the passing of MILO DUNPHY, who was described by Charles Birch as "*one of Australia's greatest environmentalists, totally dedicated and untiring in his efforts to create an ecologically sustainable society*".